Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025

https://archive.org/details/queenshousenarra00alld_1

THE QUEEN'S HOUSE.

A Narrative.

BY

LIZZIE ALLDRIDGE,

AUTHOR OF "BY LOVE AND LAW," "THE WORLD SHE AWOKE IN," "THE TOWER GARDENS," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:

RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON,

Publishers in Ordinary to Her Majesty the Queen.

1886.

(*All rights reserved.*)

PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, LIMITED, LONDON AND BECCLES.

CONTENTS OF VOL. III.

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	His Parents	1
II.	The Rector's Mission ...	14
III.	Basil demonstrates	42
IV.	Settled	57
V.	Basil the Alisonite	68
VI.	In the Church of the English Martyrs	90
VII.	The Chapel of St. John	105
VIII.	Above the Moat	129
IX.	Mariora comes Home	143
X.	The Beginning of the End ...	158
XI.	Alison's Little Plot	181
XII.	The Look Out	192
XIII.	The After-glow	212
XIV.	Her Other Self	227

CHAPTER		PAGE
XV.	Across the Water	234
XVI.	He has his Wish	243
XVII.	Parted: Alison	253
XVIII.	Parted: Basil	258
XIX.	His Sister	262
XX.	Her Resolve	271
XXI.	Mrs. Bayliss's Tenants ...	277
XXII.	The Turn of the Year ...	292
XXIII.	Impossible?	296
XXIV.	Alison's New Year ...	303
XXV.	What the Wall heard ...	316
XXVI.	In the North	318
XXVII.	Beyond the Birren	327
XXVIII.	At Last	330
XXIX.	July	332

THE QUEEN'S HOUSE.

CHAPTER I.

HIS PARENTS.

The face of the Rector of Low Kelvingham beamed with satisfaction as he took in the meaning of his son's letter—by a long way the nearest approach to anything filial he had received from him for some years.

"My love, come and listen to this! Here is such a fine letter from Basil!" he exclaimed. He was standing at the window, letter in hand, glasses on nose.

"From Basil! That is good! So long he has not written!" and Mrs. Penrose waddled up to her husband as fast as she could.

"He says I am to give you his love, and I'm sure I do so with all my heart! I told you how it would be. I'm right, you see. Listen!"

They stood side by side, this oddly contrasted pair, the tall, well-preserved English clergyman, and his short, dumpy, foreign wife, with the figure like a sack, going over their son's letter with parental delight. The wife, overjoyed at her son's remembrance of her, could do nothing but admire his love for her. Ignoring all else, she grasped what were to her the two salient points; her Basil had not forgotten her, her Basil was going to give her pleasure, was going to take her with him to some gay place, where there were shops and people. Shops and people! And so dull the Suffolk fields were, where they saw no one!

"Grand man, Basil! Good son, Basil; he must think always of his mother!" she exclaimed, looking up at her husband with all her maternal love—by far her strongest

affection—lighting up her still fine dark eyes. "We go see that boy to-day! Father of Basil, to-day we must go! How long since I do not see him!"

"Well, my love, this is, indeed, more than I could have hoped!" returned the father of Basil, quite overwhelmed with astonishment and delight. "This is more than I could have hoped!" That his son was really engaged to that girl, of whom he himself so highly approved, was much, very much; but that his son should condescend to allow him the privilege of rendering him a delicate and interesting service, was almost *too* much for him. Few things, indeed, give the parents of to-day more genuine pleasure than to be respectfully, but firmly, ordered about by their children. "I told you so, my love; I told you so! That dear girl will be the making of our Basil! She'll make him settle down!"

"It is a great man! To-day we must go and see him! To-day, queek! Sharp!"

They managed to catch the first train up, and on one of the many platforms of the Great Eastern Terminus, they found Basil waiting for them. Truly, to see Basil stoop to be kissed on both cheeks, and embraced by that mother of his, was a sight not to be forgotten. Basil could be very graceful and charming when he liked—and he did like just then—so he bent down to the much-wrinkled, upturned face, that had not only lost all the beauty it once had, but had grown almost hideous, and submitted, with absolute disregard of the British public, to an amount of extravagant caressing that few English sons would ever have permitted, or, if permitted, never could have forgiven. It was a curious, sack-like figure, that he at last succeeded in getting into a cab. It was arrayed in black silk, unmistakably of the mourning hat-band kind, and much black Maltese lace. Mrs. Penrose imagined that her toilette was strictly that of the British matron of the country clergywoman's type;

and, perhaps, each article might in itself have been most orthodox, but the general effect was drapery, in the artistic sense, and not garments.

"So, mother, you are glad to see me again?" said Basil, as soon as he had packed her safely into the cab and they were driving off.

"Ah, why I not see you so long, you bad boy, you! This naise place this—shops so many, so many!" said Mrs. Penrose, whose sole idea of civilization was shops.

"Yes, I thought it would be about the ticket for you, mother. I say," Basil went on, "when we've got rid of him,"—shrugging the shoulder nearest his father—"we'll go out on the spree—won't we, mother?"

"The spree?" Mrs. Penrose asked.

"Yes, the spree, the lark, the rampage, all that sort of thing, you know! You've been croaking enough lately, I dare say. Very dull at Kelvingham?"

"Beast of place! Dull hole! Mariora not at home now. When she sing, makit

it light in the house! She good gairl, beautiful gairl, Mariora!"

"So the little chap is away, is she?" asked Basil.

"Yes," said Mr. Penrose, "she's in the north, just now."

"Let her stay there!" said Basil, with decision. "She always was a fool. Don't let her spoil my Alison, that's all I have to say about her."

"They will do each other a great deal of good," said Mr. Penrose.

"Not they!"

"Really, Basil, if you are going to hamper me like this, you had better do your own business yourself," said the rector with dignity. "Of course, your sister and Miss Bayliss must know each other—that is, if *I* am to act in the matter."

"Hang it all! I suppose they must! It will have to come to that!"

"Of course it will; and what is more, I must go to work in my own way, or not at all. If you leave it to me, it will

be all right; if you don't, it will be all wrong."

"Well, I suppose you understand these creatures better than I do. Go ahead, then! Do as you like, father, as it appears that in these entirely personal concerns every one is to have his or her own way, except the only two persons who have any right to be heard at all in the matter."

"You must remember, Basil, that you now have, I am truly thankful to say, gentlewomen to deal with," observed the rector with severity.

"I know it, father, only too well," said Basil.

"There is not the slightest occasion to be profane about it," said Mr. Penrose, for Basil had flung in a few emphatic expletives.

Then it struck him that perhaps he had gone far enough in the line of paternal rebuke, and that if he did not mind what he was about, his son might refuse, after all, to let him conduct that interesting and

delicate mission on which his whole heart was set. It was a very long while since Basil had allowed him to do anything for him. Even when, at long intervals, Basil stayed for a night at Low Kelvingham Rectory, he invariably left behind him, on the study mantelpiece, the coins that he reckoned would exactly pay for his board and lodging. "None of your spoil for me, thank you very much, all the same!" he used to say. Early in his teens, Basil had hit upon a little invention—an improved boot-fastening, I think it was;—an elderly man, with a scientific turn, had got it patented for him. It had been wonderfully successful. With the proceeds, Basil had started for the continent and an independent career. He had been independent ever since. He had, of late years, only made one stay of any length at Kelvingham. He had managed, however, to do a good deal of harm during that one visit.

"Well, and the financial position? What am I to tell Mrs. Bayliss on that very im-

portant subject?" asked Mr. Penrose, as the cab was blocked up near Aldgate church.

Basil's answer was satisfactory. Pure science—the research was not paying, of course; no one expected that. But the little inventions were; and the one on which Basil was building his most sanguine hopes, looked extremely promising.

They crossed, at length, into the Minories, where one side of the street had been pulled down, and drove to Tower Hill.

"Well, here we are," said Basil. "Mother and I will go and amuse ourselves, won't we? I'll give you two hours, Rev., to get matters cut and dried, and to have your lunch. Mrs. Bayliss is sure to ask you to lunch; no woman of her type could resist your uniform, even if the Venerable Nick himself wore it. *À bientôt!* Woe be to you, if you fail! But you won't; you're such an old hand at it, aren't you?"

Laughing, Basil sprang out of the cab on to the pavement, in front of John

Harbuckle's house, Mr. Penrose following, with a curious expression of importance and delight on his face.

"My dear boy, you may depend on my doing my best," he said, under his voice, with emphasis.

"Oh yes! I'll give even a parent his due; he's sure to do his best, according to his light, such as it is!" returned Basil. "There you are now," he went on, pointing to the open double door. "Go straight up to the first floor, ring the bell, and ask for Mrs. Bayliss. The rest is with——"

"Precisely!" said the rector, smiling with a full and delightful consciousness of what he meant to do, as he stepped from the threshold into the broad hall of John Harbuckle's house; the whole of his plan of action, which he had carefully elaborated in the train, neatly stowed away, all ready for immediate use, within his somewhat capacious brain. "Basil is quite right, for once!" he said to him-

self, as he went up the stairs. "Few people understand certain phases of feminine character better than I do.—Certain phases," he added, with a side-thought for his own wife and daughter, whom he sometimes found it difficult to manage. Then he touched the well-polished brass bell by the side of the crimson baize door.

"Now, mother," said Basil, seating himself beside her in the cab, after the rector had disappeared, "you and I will just go and enjoy ourselves! And, first, we'll get something to eat that isn't English. Tired of English? You can enjoy yourself with me, can't you?"

She gave him one upward glance, out of the unfathomable depths of her glowing eyes, as they drove off together. "With you—always!" she returned, with a warmth that was pathetic, considering how seldom she was permitted the luxury of her son's presence. Poor woman! she wanted little else to make her happy; it very often

seemed hard to her that this simple, natural pleasure should be denied her.

"Well, mother," said Basil, "you make it good for my Alison; then—" falling into her curious accent—"then I makit it very good for you; you see how good I makit it."

"Ah, my dear; but always, always I must be afraid of th' othair one! Suppose she killit you? Suppose she killit your naice gairl? Always I must be afraid of her. It is because I love you so, my dear, I must always be afraid," said the mother hurriedly.

"You leave that to me," said Basil severely. "All you've to do, is to be good to my Alison. So, no nonsense, mother. You understand?"

"Ahl-er-right; I makit it good, you see, my boy!" replied Mrs. Penrose, with an assuring nod. "I do always just what it likit you. What else I got to live for, my dear?"

"Very well, then; I shall come and see

you, or you shall come out with me—but that will depend upon how you behave, you know," said Basil with decision.

"You see!" replied Mrs. Penrose, with a knowingness that almost suggested a wink. "I English lady now, you see! I must wonder!" she exclaimed eagerly, quite changing her tone, as she caught sight of a couple of Levantines, at the corner of Houndsditch. "I must wonder! How like those men to my father!"

"I must wonder," said Basil to himself, "how the Rev. is getting on! If he doesn't make all straight, I shall have to take Mrs. Bayliss in hand myself; and, if so, I fear she won't get quite as much satisfaction out of the tug of war as I shall."

"Ah, Basil! You grand man, you fine man! Men of my country fine men, like you!"

CHAPTER II.

THE RECTOR'S MISSION.

Could any human being have felt more absolutely and entirely happy than Alison Bayliss, as she and Basil stood together at the gate of the Tower Garden that faces the gigantic block of bonded warehouses that dominates Tower Hill? When they had at length parted, she walked up the hill towards home in a state of ecstatic blissfulness. How had he spoken to the deepest depths of her heart! Not only had he told her of his love to her, but of her good influence over him. "You, my soul, my conscience—all I never believed in before I saw you!" She was unspeakably thankful and happy and humble as she went up the hill, her face full of the

strange radiancy of the inner light that was making glad her heart. At the last point from which Basil could see her she turned; he was still at the gate, watching her. Then she turned again towards her home, which was but a few yards further.

She was walking along, as in a happy dream, under the shade of the great plane trees, when a young woman passed quite close to her, muttering to herself about her false, false lover. Alison glanced up at her. It was the young woman with the rich tawny hair and dead-white face she had seen in the loathsome den to which she had taken the wreath of Muirhead flowers for the dead baby. Alison recognized her, although the woman was sadly altered, and her first impulse was to stop her and speak to her. But the other had never seen her as they passed; she was going along with uneven steps, evidently with her mind fixed on some other object than the world around her. She seemed to see nothing. But Alison distinctly

heard the low muttering about the false, false lover. Coming suddenly upon her at that moment, it gave her a shock. "So much sorrow," she said to herself, "and I so happy! Why should I be so very happy? Why?" She looked back. She saw the sad, drooping figure, that once must have been so grand and liberally made, going over the same ground she herself had just trodden. She sighed for the sorrow of the world; but she was too happy to be sad many moments. Before she had reached home—but a stone's throw from the great plane trees—she had forgotten all, except the mighty facts that she and Basil were engaged, and that her mother would have to be told about it.

Alison found her mother lying on the sofa, with so very bad a headache that she could neither talk to her daughter nor look at her. So, for that evening, Alison managed to keep her secret. But Mrs. Bayliss was much better—in fact, quite well—the next morning, and a very few

minutes after she had seen her daughter, she was quite certain that Alison and Basil had met, and, if not actually engaged, at least understood each other. Why, Alison could not even look at her mother in a natural way; and as for conversation—Bah! Of course, Mrs. Bayliss knew all about it, without being told; for Alison was about as transparent as the clearest glass. "Alison says she won't keep our engagement a secret," Basil Penrose had written to his father; but if he had observed his usual accuracy, he would have struck out "won't," and have written "can't" instead. At the same time, Alison found it quite as impossible to tell her mother what had happened.

Mrs. Bayliss waited for her daughter to speak; she, moreover, gave her plenty of opportunities; but it was of no use, Alison was silent. She looked so sweet, so pretty, with her heightened, tremulous colour, and her bright eyes, that her mother could not help being touched. But the more she felt

the situation, the more she hated Basil, for daring to have the insolence to make love to this dear child of hers, who represented to Mrs. Bayliss an ideal young womanhood she herself had never possessed. Mrs. Bayliss remembered well enough that, in the days of her own youth, she had never dreamed of telling *her* mother about her love affairs. But then, in her own eyes, she had been only an ordinary mortal, quite fallible, and not the transcendental maiden she fondly imagined her daughter to be.

When Sunday had passed, and then Monday, without a word from Alison, the mother's romantic respect for her daughter became gradually lowered; she began to suspect that Alison was, after all, only such a one as she herself had been. "It is inconceivable!" she said to herself. "I can't understand how Alison can have gone to church twice with me, and not have told me! It only shows how bad that man's influence over her must be. I

cannot understand how a girl like Alison can have yielded so blindly to him! I cannot endure the idea of that creature exercising such a power over my Alison. I hate that man! I always shall hate him. If he had had one spark of true manliness in him, he would have come and confronted me boldly. I despise a man who is a coward in love! My James wasn't!" So it was a very dull Sunday, both for Alison and her mother; dull, that is, as far as their intercourse with each other went. Mentally, they were both in a highly excited state, and each longing to throw herself into the other's arms.

Early on Monday morning, Alison had a long letter from Basil, telling her what he had done. It was her very first love-letter, and it was most strangely like Basil; for he always had the power of putting himself into everything he did. It was charming to read; charming to look at. Like its author, it was strongly picturesque, and full of passionate love, touched here and there

with that whimsical playfulness Alison found so attractive. It filled her with wonder and joy. After she had read it through and through, she stood still gazing dreamily at it, hardly daring to believe it real, or, being real, really for her. He had written to his father, he said. He had requested him to come up to town at once. "But ought I to let the news come from a stranger? I don't think I ought," she said to herself, a dozen times over, during the day. "I wonder when Mr. Penrose will come? As soon as possible, no doubt. In the meantime, I shall go crazy. I must tell her." But all that day she could not.

On Tuesday morning she was upstairs in Uncle John's den, trying to write, but quite unable to put away her own affairs, when she broke off in the middle of a sentence with: "As a matter of absolute right or wrong, what ought I to do? I don't like my mother to hear the news from a stranger. Shall I? Is it my duty—

ought I to go and tell her myself? Certainly, I know her better than any one else does. Yes, I must tell her myself! Oh, if she only liked him, even a little! But to go and tell her that I am engaged to a man she turned out of the house! Oh, what an awful, awful thing to do! What a shame! I don't know how I'm to forgive her for that; really, I don't! I'm afraid if I do go and tell her, I may fly into one of my dreadful tempers. Perhaps I'd better not attempt it. I don't think I can. I won't!" She beat a tattoo against the leg of the table with her slipper, she played five-finger exercises with her fingers on her desk. "It must come from me! It shall!" she decided at length. "I owe it to my mother. 'How far does the lady's filial duty extend?' 'My filial duty goes a long way.'" She smiled—how fondly, how proudly—as she recalled the scene on the Prisoner's Walk. Her elbow was on the desk, her fingers, for the moment, clutching the collar of her dress; she

leaned her head back against her wrist, and looked out of the window up into the grey sky, smiling,—smiling,—smiling! What a dear face it was!

Few people ever saw Alison at her very best; no one, not even Basil, had seen her look as she looked then. She did not see the grey sky; only those two figures on the Prisoner's Walk, one of which she knew was Basil, the other, Alison. She lingered; the scene was too pleasant to disturb, the picture too sweet to break up. But it melted away of itself. St. Paul's, as seen from the Tower wall, dissolved into her father's grave; the Thames into the rushing Birren Water; the two figures into her mother's and herself, in deepest mourning. Her eyes dimmed; she rose at once, smoothed her hair, which had been touched of late too many times by her nervous fingers, and went downstairs, ready to put her arms round the widow's neck, and tell her all. Her mother was writing letters in the dining-room.

"Are you busy, mother?" Alison asked, her voice wavering up and down, as it always did when she was agitated. It was at the prosaic hour of midday—no twilight to veil blushes and make confidences easy.

Mrs. Bayliss looked up, pen in hand. "I am writing to Scotland, dear; but the five o'clock post will do for that. We really ought to be in Birrendale now. We are losing all the fine weather."

"You haven't spoken to me before about going away again. And we only came home last week, mother!" said Alison, a little reproachfully, getting into the corner of the sofa nearest her mother. "Why haven't you talked to me about this?"

"Oh, I was only writing a tentative little note—fishing for an invitation, in point of fact. I dare say I shall find some one who will take us in. Cauld-knowe won't be empty for three weeks to come, you know; that will make it so late," and Mrs. Bayliss put her pen on the rest, and

turned to her daughter for what she hoped would prove a confidential talk.

"I—I—don't exactly care about going to Scotland just now," faltered Alison.

"Well, dear, you know you will have to meet Alec, as a connection of Mac and Jessie's, some time or another; so, really, the sooner it happens, the better. Alec is far too sensible of what is due to you, and too thoroughly a gentleman, to be in any way disagreeably importunate; although, from what I hear, I am sure he must have taken your refusal very terribly to heart, poor dear fellow!"

"I wasn't thinking about that when I spoke," said Alison; "I was thinking about —that is—there is something I want to tell you very much——"

"You have seen Basil Penrose again, I suppose," said Mrs. Bayliss, in as level a tone as she could assume, giving "her antipathy" merely his name, and carefully refraining from such terms as "that fiend," or "that wretched man at the Tower."

Alison bent her head slowly. "I—I—like him," she murmured.

"Yes, I know you do. I don't. By-the-by, Uncle John told me, just before he went out, that he met Hugh Merriman in Cockspur Street, on Saturday. He is ordered to India; they start this week. Uncle John asked him if he were coming down to the Tower, to say good-bye to his friends there. He said, 'No, I shall write. I can't run the risk of meeting Penrose.' John remarked that he had thought they were such great chums. 'So we were,' said the poor young fellow, and he seemed, John said, desperately hurt—'so we were; and then he dropped me like a hot copper!'"

"Dropped like a hot copper!" The phrase jarred painfully on Alison's nerves.

Mrs. Bayliss saw her shot had told, so she gave it a moment or two before she went on—

"For my own part, I like a man who sticks to his friends."

"Yes, but they must be real friends,

before you can stick to them!" exclaimed Alison, rushing in wildly to rescue her lover from the implication of fickleness. "Now it is utterly impossible that—that—Basil Penrose could ever have made a friend—really and truly *a friend*—of Hugh Merriman. It is out of all question."

"And why?"

"Why? Why—why—they are on such totally different levels, don't you see!" cried Alison, with that shy defiance of hers blazing up.

Mrs. Bayliss did not think fit to tell her daughter that the young Guardsman, while lamenting Basil's change of mind, had, with true British pluck, wound up with, "But still, I maintain he's the Coming Man!" or, no doubt, Alison would have raised the gallant young soldier's level a good deal nearer Basil's.

"So, Alison," continued Mrs. Bayliss, dismissing the Guardsman, "you have seen Basil Penrose again?"

"More than once. Yes—" hesitating;

then, hurriedly—"I wish you liked him, mother! Why don't you?"

"Because I detest him!" was the widow's answer to herself; but, determined to be amiable, she said kindly, laying her hand gently on her daughter's arm—

"Why do *you like* him, my dear child?"

"I don't know! I do. He is different from every one else in the world."

"My sweet darling, they always are; your father was; but, thank God, there was none of the Basil Penrose in him!"

"You hate him! You do, you do! You turned him out of the house! How could you be guilty of such a disgraceful thing?" broke out Alison passionately. "He—he—would have come here often, if you had not been so—so—I don't want to say anything to hurt your feelings, so——"

"I admit I was unwise; I went a little too far," put in Mrs. Bayliss, who knew very well the value of a judicious apology.

"Would you mind—that is, may I tell him so, mother? And you liked his father,

didn't you?" exclaimed Alison brightly, twisting round suddenly, and quite altering her tone.

"Oh, yes; you may tell him I went too far, and am sorry for it. It was, really, quite as much his fault as mine, though. So you have seen him often?"

"No, not often—three times; and—there, I must tell you everything—he has asked me to—I mean—he wants to be engaged to me. Of course, we shall have to wait; but I can never care for any one else; and I do so wish you could like him just a little, for my sake. I am sure my father would have liked him. Do like him, mother!"

"Has it come to that! Tsh! tsh! tsh! tsh! tsh!" ejaculated Mrs. Bayliss, gravely shaking her head. "My poor, poor girl!"

Alison sprang up from the sofa, feeling that she had just managed to throw down her bombshell, but was now terribly afraid of the effects. She did not dare to wait longer; she must rush away.

Mrs. Bayliss put out her hand, and grasped her daughter firmly by the wrist, where Alison's pulse was throbbing wildly.

"Alison, I cannot trust you to that man! You are too precious to me," she said, solemnly and tenderly, looking up, the while, intently into her daughter's quivering face.

"But, mother, dearest, I—I trust him with myself. I trust him with——"

Alison's last faltering words were lost; for, at that juncture, there was a tap at the door; it was opened, and they both heard—

"Mr. Penrose, the clergyman, ma'am."

"I will be with him directly," said Mrs. Bayliss, with admirable presence of mind and command of voice.

Alison fled.

If, as a very great man writes, "the only true happiness for man is that of clear, decided activity, in the sphere for which, by nature and circumstances, he has been fitted and appointed," then the Reverend Basil Penrose must have been happy indeed,

as he waited in Mrs. Bayliss's drawing-room for that lady's appearance; for he felt very conscious that his son had entrusted him with a mission for which he was peculiarly well adapted. "It is the kind of nature I understand so well," he said to himself once more, as he stood looking up at John Harbuckle's prints of Old London on the walls, his hands—which were a good deal larger than his son's—clasped behind his back, and holding his soft felt hat.

He looked exactly what he was; a clergyman of strictly moderate views, yet with a tendency, judiciously kept in check, towards "High Church," as he understood it. The length of his coat, by which, they say, one may measure the height of the Church, hinted at surpliced choirs and choral services, rigidly Anglican; but stopped a good way short of vestments. Distinctly clerical, he was not at all priestly. He took up one or two religious books and papers that lay on a side table,

and knew that he and the widow held the same ecclesiastical views. It seemed to him that his map of the campaign presented no very difficult ground; a comfortable assurance of success smiled at him from every corner of the room.

A couple of minutes later, Mrs. Bayliss appeared. He advanced a few steps to meet her, with the easy air of self-possession that was habitual to him; for he was generally a welcome guest everywhere he went. Remembering the almost gushing manner in which Mrs. Bayliss had parted from him on a certain memorable Sunday, he was preparing to shake hands with her heartily. He intended to throw into his greeting a kind of welcome to her, as a connection of his own family. He meant his first greeting to convey: "Well, my dear Mrs. Bayliss, we have the pleasure of meeting again, as the seconds in a highly interesting affair, of which the principals are your daughter and my son. Allow me to congratulate both you and myself on

the advantage of this proposed union of our families, and to assure you that few things have ever given me greater happiness than joining you in," etc., etc.

This, and a good deal more, was written on the rector's face and outstretched hand, as he advanced to meet Mrs. Bayliss; but, hardly had he taken two steps towards her, than he perceived that the almost too-gushing middle-aged lady of the Sunday visit, was not by any means represented by the severely dignified woman who, half an inch taller than usual, and with her colourless head erect, was approaching him without a smile.

"I hope you are very well," said Mr. Penrose.

"Thanks. I am pretty well," returned Mrs. Bayliss, offering her visitor the tips of her fingers.

"It is a lovely morning," Mr. Penrose went on.

"Yes, it seems as if it were a fine morning. Pray be seated."

"Thanks."

Mr. Penrose subsided into a chair near the window. Mrs. Bayliss took one at a little distance from him. Then there was a long and awkward pause.

"I am fortunate in finding you at home," the clergyman resumed with distant politeness, preparing to meet Mrs. Bayliss on her own ground. "I thought you might possibly be at your place in Birrendale."

"We have only just returned from Belgium; we shall probably go to Scotland next week."

"Did I tell you my daughter has been staying with Lady Birrendale?"

"I think you mentioned it."

"She is there still."

"Indeed!" with a proper and decorous smile of interest.

"She tells me she had the pleasure of meeting a niece of yours at Muirhead."

"Ah! Jessie. Yes;" assented Mrs. Bayliss, with a sort of finality of expression,

as if she wished to make that the end of the subject.

But Mr. Penrose thought Jessie far too good a topic—or rather, opening—to be so speedily dismissed.

"Oh, yes; my daughter gives us most glowing accounts of your niece's beauty and wit."

"That is very good of her. I did not know, however, that Jessie had any quality so grand as wit."

"Not wit? Well, then, supposing we say sprightliness?"

"She is lively, certainly," said Jessie's aunt, her tone adding plainly enough, to the clergyman's ears, "I wonder when you are going."

The rector bent the soft brim of his hat up and down with a depressing consciousness that he was not gaining ground. He looked at Mrs. Bayliss. She appeared to be gazing at some object of interest in Australia. There was a polite, well-bred smile on her lips; but her faded face, her

colourless eye-lashes, her pale smooth hair, all presented a truly aggravating expression. There was something about her lack of positive tone and colour, that looked as if it ought to be so gentle and easy to conquer, but which, somehow or another, never failed to strike despair into the rash person who set himself to try to alter her mind on any given subject. Few women had changed their minds less frequently than Mrs. Bayliss; and when she changed it, it was to please herself, not because she had yielded to another's arguments. Mr. Penrose wished he were a bishop, with a shovel hat, apron, and gaiters; his ordinary clerical uniform was not equal to the occasion. If he had known Mrs. Bayliss more thoroughly, he would have wished he were the whole Bench. Mr. Penrose felt a good deal depressed for a few minutes, and wondered what he should next say. Should he summon all his conversational powers, and talk her into a good temper, in spite of herself;

or should he open fire at once, with the great subject of the day, and risk consequences? Among that "bundle of short lengths," of which, according to Basil, the rector's mind was composed, obstinacy was, perhaps, the longest and strongest; he had no more idea of being beaten by the widow than she had of yielding to him. They were pretty equally matched in that respect.

"You are, perhaps, engaged this morning? I have called at an unconscionably early hour," he began again, apologetically, but with a certain decision.

"Oh, not at all! I am very glad to see you," returned Mrs. Bayliss, her words and tone striking her visitor like a damp fog, or wet blanket.

"Very kind of you to say so; but to tell you the truth—" and he looked at her firmly, as he was accustomed to do at the school children, or choir boys, when they were restive in church—"I should hardly have called so early, but that I have come

upon a somewhat—in fact, I may say, upon a very important mission."

"You are building a new chancel—new schools?" suggested Mrs. Bayliss, as if trying to help him out of his difficulty. No one could have imagined that she knew, perfectly well, what that mission must be.

"No. And I don't, as a rule, beg out of our diocese. The fact is, my dear Mrs. Bayliss, there has been, I find, for some time past, an attachment between your very charming daughter and my son. You have noticed it, of course? Ladies always *do* see these things."

Mrs. Bayliss was silent for a second. "Mr. Penrose," she then said, with a great, but not too severe, dignity ,"I regret to have to say that you and your son are two very different persons."

"That is true—very true; and, let me add, I regret exceedingly that it should be so. My son does not walk in those good old paths you and I find, so truly,

the ways of safety; but in spite of much we could both wish altered, he is a very fine fellow, is my son Basil, possessing, as he does, original talents—I think I may almost venture to say genius—of a remarkably high order. I do not wonder that your daughter, with that appreciation for science and literature, which so strongly marks her, has found Basil—may I say, attractive?"

"It surprises me exceedingly. I cannot imagine what she can have been thinking about. I am to understand, then, that your son has commissioned you to see me on this—er—subject?"

"Well, yes; certainly. He seems to think you are—if I may venture to say so—slightly, rather perhaps, *unduly* prejudiced against him."

"Unduly?" with a cutting little laugh. "Well, Mr. Penrose, if your son is afraid of speaking out, my daughter is not. She has already told me of the affair, and I have answered her. She can, if she chooses,

tell your son what I said; as far as I am concerned, she is perfectly at liberty to do so. And now,"—suddenly smiling in her most gracious and hospitable manner—"and now, lunch is ready. You will stay, won't you?"

Her entire change of manner put an end to the combat more absolutely than the hardest words could have done. Without discourtesy, it was not possible for the rector to add another syllable. He felt she had the best of it, but he would not own himself beaten.

"Thanks," he said cheerfully, rising and following her.

"And Mrs. Penrose — you said you would bring her?" asked the widow, as they crossed the landing to the dining-room. "She is well, I hope?"

"Very well, thanks. She will be here, presently. She has gone shopping with Basil. It is so seldom we are in town; we must make the most of it when we come, you know."

"Shall we wait a little while for her?" asked Mrs. Bayliss.

"My son will be sure to look after his mother, thank you.—Ah, Miss Bayliss!" as he met Alison on the threshold of the dining-room. "And when are we to have that ramble together, among the City churches?"

Alison's reply made her feel once more that, as usual, she had made a fool of herself. "What can it mean? What am I to understand? Are they friends or foes?" she asked herself, in bewilderment, as she took her place at table opposite the Rector of Low Kelvingham, Basil's father. It was a cruel uncertainty for Alison. But the table-talk was really quite brilliant, for the clergyman was great at conversation, especially when supported by a couple of ladies—both of whom took an interest in ecclesiastical affairs—and an old bachelor antiquary. His conversation was not, however, all on Church matters; he diverged, after a while, carefully and warily, and

with set purpose, into sketches of the modern scientific world; speaking of several well-known men, not as leaders in the van of progress, so much as prominent figures in Society, who owned wives—some of them young and beautiful—and daughters, more or less charming; men who themselves went to balls, and even danced occasionally. The rector was still not at all bad at an anecdote, and was now, as he always had been, an excellent companion. Still, for Alison, the uncertainty was cruel.

CHAPTER III.

BASIL DEMONSTRATES.

Mrs. Penrose had enjoyed herself very much. She had been taken by her son to a foreign restaurant, and to many foreign shops. She had seen people and things that were not English, she had heard men speak in dialects she understood, she had been with Basil. She was happy indeed when the cab again stopped at John Harbuckle's door. The getting Mrs. Penrose and all her parcels safely out required care; but Basil's manipulation was always both firm and delicate, so everything was taken into the house in excellent order, including even Mrs. Penrose, who, to do her justice, had learned to face the terrors of an English drawing-room with admirable composure,

due, in a large measure, no doubt, to a certain native dignity of her own, but more, I am inclined to think, to the kind and judicious treatment of her husband, who had been so unsparing in his praise, that she had now a perfect confidence in her imitation of the ways of the British matron.

They found Mr. Penrose and John Harbuckle examining fragments of Roman pottery, recently disinterred from under the demolished Ordnance Office that so long had defaced the view of the White Tower from the river; while Mrs. Bayliss and Alison were both doing their best to make the entertainment a success, by continually unearthing various other relics, some of which had not the remotest connection with the subject in hand; only the mother and daughter seemed as if they felt obliged to hover round the men like guardian angels. The clergyman was evidently relieved when the door was opened, and Basil, with his mother, appeared.

"Ah, here is Mrs. Penrose!" he exclaimed, stepping towards his wife.

Mrs. Bayliss smiled radiantly,—far too radiantly her brother thought, and he had long studied her, to him, expressive countenance.

"So glad to see you!" said Mrs. Bayliss.

"So kind of you to say so! I hope you are very well. I have been to so many, many shops; you see, Basil, poor boy, he is quite crowded," said Mrs. Penrose amiably, and quite at her ease as she shook hands.

Mrs. Bayliss acknowledged the reference to Basil by the slightest bow possible. It was quite enough for that astute young man; he measured the depth of the rector's failure by the distance of that bow.

"Oh, I say! really, Mr. Harbuckle," he began, as he shook hands with Alison, without looking at her, "the state of East-cheap and Tower Street to-day defies exaggeration. You ought to see to it; you ought, indeed!"

"Undoubtedly the most extensive demolition since the Great Fire," replied John Harbuckle, with a bland smile; and then he took up a piece of Samian ware, and gazed at it as if he loved it, which, no doubt, he did.

The rector and his son looked at each other. "I'm sorry for the poor old Rev.!" thought Basil, as his father slightly raised his eyebrows, and shrugged his shoulders dismally.

"How about trains, father?" asked Basil.

The rector took out his watch, and observed to his wife: "My dear, we must be starting; it is later than I thought. Really, with so many objects of interest the time has flown so pleasantly and so rapidly, that really—" And then there was a gracious and elaborate leave-taking.

John Harbuckle, whose thoughts were with the letters he knew he ought to be writing in his office, went downstairs with Mr. and Mrs. Penrose, and saw them into a cab. Basil went with them also.

"Thank heaven they've all gone!" exclaimed Mrs. Bayliss, with a sigh of relief, as she sank into her favourite Indian chair by the window.

Alison heard a step on the stairs, and disappeared at once; when she reached the stairs, she saw that Basil was returning alone. Noiselessly, she went to him, the fluttering of her heart almost choking her.

"I've told her. She says she can't," she whispered hurriedly.

"I know! Will you back me up?" returned Basil, kissing her.

"I must!" and away she flew.

"What! He's never coming back?" cried Mrs. Bayliss, aghast with horror, rising from her chair as his steps on the stairs caught her ear. "I won't see him. I will *not* see him! This is a planned thing!"

She rose, but he was in the room, and had shut the door, before she could escape.

"Just one minute," he said politely, but standing where he could effectually inter-

cept her flight if she should attempt to leave.

"I know—I know what you are going to say," she said, putting out her hands as if to ward off both him and his subject. "Pray do not attempt to re-open a discussion that can only prove as painful as it is totally useless. Your father will have told you; if not, my daughter shall write."

"I really must ask you to listen to me," said Basil, in that peculiar tone of his, that always suggested an inquisitor; the tone that at once aroused obstinacy, and demanded obedience, under the severest pains and penalties.

Mrs. Bayliss looked him full in the face, with that dogged resoluteness of hers before which most persons quailed.

"What can you have to say that I have not heard?" she asked, her eyes gleaming like steel.

The antipathy she had hitherto felt for Basil, was as nothing to the hatred and fear of him now, as she saw him standing

there, looking as unmoved as if she herself had no existence.

"Well, you see, Mrs. Bayliss, there are several views of the situation that I should like to be allowed to submit for your consideration.

"They couldn't alter my decision one fraction."

"No? At any rate, I should like you to hear me. Shall we not sit?" ("Where is John? How dare he leave me alone like this!" passed rapidly through the mind of John's sister, as she sat down, stiffly, on the end of the sofa nearest the bell.) "I know my foolish ways have rather prejudiced you against me," said Basil, dropping the imperious tone out of his voice, and taking a chair near the window. "I will let that pass, as I never attempt what I cannot carry through; and, of course, a lady's prejudices are insurmountable; so I will not try to get over them. Your daughter, however, has been kind enough to appreciate some of my qualities, and,

to put it plainly, I am very fond of her, and she returns my feeling. This, of course, is a matter entirely personal; an affair really concerning no one besides Alison and myself. I do not permit my own parents the slightest authority in such matters; but I wish, if possible, to respect Alison's sentiments, not only as regards filial duty, but on every other point. I ask you, therefore, to sanction our engagement."

"That I will never do!" cried Mrs. Bayliss, with the utmost tartness and decision.

"As far as the engagement itself is concerned, nothing except Alison's own change of mind can alter that," continued Basil. "The only question is, whether the marriage shall take place next spring—which is what we should wish—or, whether you will drive me to getting a license to-morrow morning."

"You cannot, surely, be talking of *my daughter!*" exclaimed Mrs. Bayliss, viciously.

"Yes, indeed, I am," returned Basil, quite simply.

"Then how little you can know of her character, if you think she would run away to get married! I have every confidence in Alison."

"So have I. I think I've gauged her character pretty accurately; and I have, as you may have heard, quite a reputation for accuracy. Alison would go with me to the end of the earth, if I asked her; only, as it happens, I don't want to ask her. My work over there, in the Tower, is not quite finished yet. If you would let me, I should like to finish it before getting married, because I hate leaving things incomplete. It is a necessity of my nature to try to carry things as far as they'll go, and I don't think Alison would be comfortable in the Salt Tower."

He spoke quite simply and earnestly; not even Mrs. Bayliss could truthfully accuse his tone of want of courtesy, or his manner of any attempt either at intimi-

dation or flippancy. What he said he appeared to say because it was his own most earnest conviction; in fact, the simplest statement of fact. He had declared that Alison would follow him to the end of the earth! And Mrs. Bayliss believed him now. Never before had she at all understood what it was in this "antipathy" of hers, that had so fascinated her daughter; but now she herself became aware of a subtle influence, against which she at once fought desperately, but the strength of which made her tremble for Alison. Was he a wizard, a mesmerist? All the horrible stories of unholy fascination she had heard came back to her. What that man said was true; there was no place under heaven to which Alison would not follow him, drawn away from all who loved her, by some secret, irresistible spell.

Mrs. Bayliss rose abruptly; to parley was to yield. "Mr. Penrose," she said sternly, but not defiantly, "you shall hear from one of us presently."

"Thanks," said Basil, rising also. "You will put me out of my misery as soon as possible—won't you?" ("He really has a sort of charm—a diabolic charm," thought the widow; although I am sure no one else would have considered his expression diabolic at that moment, for he knew victory was with him, and he could afford to look amiable—even lovable.) "You see," he said, with a certain grave considerateness that was peculiar to him—"you see, this is a neighbourhood in which it would hardly do to ask a girl to meet one at street corners. Of course, I could manage to hit the time all right enough, but then, perhaps, she could not; she might be too early, and have to wait; and this isn't quite the place in which you or I would allow her to wait at a corner; so that, really, unless you will let me meet her here, I don't see what alternative I have, except to get a license for as early a date as the law allows. I could not let her wait for me at street corners; that is out of the

question. And although there are the Tower Gardens so near, I cannot forget having heard that your own niece had a stone thrown at her there, when she was talking to her present husband, before they were married. So I really must ask you, please, to think over these things a little, and to let me know your decision as soon as possible. It is the question of *our meeting*—not of *our engagement*—I want you to decide; I think I have made that clear. That is what I have been trying to demonstrate. I will hope at any rate I have succeeded; and, perhaps, on reflection, you will find a way out of the difficulty that will at once meet your own views and ours."

Mrs. Bayliss stood quietly by the table, hearing what Basil said, but making no audible comment. His long speech bewildered her. Was it prompted by an inconceivable audacity, or as inconceivable a simplicity? He spoke throughout with a gentle gravity, in which there seemed

no vestige of that morose imperiousness which was his normal characteristic.

As the widow made no answer when he paused, he asked—his short, flexible upper lip relaxing with a serious smile, and his brown eyes brightening—

"You don't often hear the truth, do you?"

The words sounded kind; there was even a touch of pity in their half-whimsical question.

"I don't know what you mean," returned Mrs. Bayliss, despairingly.

"I mean, that what I have been saying is simply the truth; that is, perhaps, the reason you find it hard to believe. But I am afraid I have taken up too much of your time already; would it help you to a decision, do you think, if I were to explain my financial affairs to Mr. Harbuckle?"

"Your father has already done so."

"I am glad of that. I want you to see that, although you have been kind enough to surround me with mystery, there is, in reality, no mystery about me; or, if there is,

it is a purely personal one—the impenetrable mystery that surrounds the simplest human being. I am—" and after one keen look at the widow, he smiled so brightly, that even Mrs. Bayliss could not control the extreme corners of her mouth—"I am only a human being; or, to put it more simply still, a man; but, most happily for me, the one man in the world who has been able to—to—" and there was that slight quiver in the sensitive lips, and that strange expression of almost girlish shyness in the bright eyes, that had once or twice, for a brief fraction of a second, so surprised Alison—"I mean—she and I love each other."

This declaration was too evidently real, too simple, too genuine and unaffected for Mrs. Bayliss not to be touched by it. She felt she had been moved, in spite of herself, and at once was again on guard.

"I can only regret the fact—if fact it is," she sighed, trying to remove herself as far as possible from Basil's influence.

"But," seeing he was about to speak again, "pray let this interview terminate now, Mr. Penrose. You shall hear from us as soon as possible."

"Before six this evening?"

"By six."

"Thanks. You see, I've spent a great deal of time to-day on private affairs; and as I have important business on hand that must be finished by to-morrow morning, I shall have to work all night; and I should like to do so with as little else on my mind as possible. I won't see Alison again before I hear from you. I hope our interview has not been too painful to you. Good morning."

He bowed, and a moment or two later left the house.

Mrs. Bayliss, who had been standing during the last few minutes, felt as if she could hardly move to her chair, so astounded was she at what had taken place, and quite as much lost in wonder at herself as at Basil Penrose.

CHAPTER IV.

SETTLED.

While Basil had been demonstrating to Alison's mother, Alison herself had been sitting on the very top stair of the upper flight, watching eagerly for every sound, wondering why he was so long. Were they having a tremendous battle? Alison had unlimited faith in the fighting powers of both of them. It frightened her to think of their obstinacy. Was Basil turning the screw as tightly as she felt he could turn it? She knew he meant to make her mother yield. She was certain he would succeed; but, although she herself had now no fear of Basil, she felt how terribly, for her sake, he might hurt another. It was in him to do it for her sake. It was all

she could do, during that waiting that seemed so endless, to keep herself from rushing downstairs to separate the combatants, on her mother's account; then, again, she dreaded the insults that she imagined Mrs. Bayliss might be heaping on Basil, and it was all she could do to restrain herself from flying to his help.

At last, after she had worked herself up to the utmost pitch of nervous excitement, she heard the door opened, and, peeping over the top banisters, she saw Basil run down to the lower regions, without so much as a look to see where she was. She flew down the stairs; but he had passed the baize door, and was gone before she reached the landing. Flushed and trembling, and her eyes full of tears, she hurried into the drawing-room. Mrs. Bayliss had sunk into her Indian chair, where she was sitting with her hands limply hanging beside her.

"Mother! What has happened? Oh, mother!" cried Alison in terror.

"Has that man gone?" asked the mother faintly.

"Yes, yes! What has happened? Oh, tell me what you have said to him! What has happened? Are you ill?"

"Are you sure he has gone—quite sure?"

"Yes," returned Alison, actually shaking with terror.

Her mother gave a groan of relief. "If the earth would only open and swallow him up!" sighed Mrs. Bayliss.

"Then I'd just jump into the hole after him! I couldn't be left behind! Oh, mother, what have you said to him?" cried Alison, falling on her knees beside the Indian chair.

Her mother clasped her arms around the girl, and began to sob out her own fervent love for Alison, her pride in her, her bitter disappointment about Muirhead, her terror of Basil, and of what had passed between them—of all, except the threat of the immediate marriage. Prudence got the better of her there.

"I cannot—cannot—take—the responsibility of—giving you—you—my darling—all that is left to me—up to that—that—I don't believe he is a human being! He's not an Englishman, that's certain! He's like the horrible wretches I've seen abroad—at Malta—at Gib! I couldn't—couldn't trust you to him! It would kill me if he were cruel to you, as those men—always—are to women. Where did that dreadful, dreadful old hag of a mother of his—that Mrs. Penrose, come from—where could she have come from?"

"From the Albanian Mountains," said Alison, the sight of her mother's distress arousing her to action and common sense, and urging her strongly to take matters in her own hands. "She was young and very lovely when Mr. Penrose married her."

"Humph! So that son of hers has a fine long ancestry of mountain brigands, has he? I thought as much! I knew there was something ferocious about him. A splendid chance for you, Alison!"

"But the English clericals, the Dean in the family! Come, mother, you know you like deans!" said Alison. "Basil, however, is neither a brigand nor a dean—but himself. When may I see him again? I *must* see him again, you know."

"You say 'must,' just as he says it! Why must you? I don't see there is any 'must' in the case."

"Why did you marry my father against the advice of all your family, mother? You know they all objected to him, every one of them—even Uncle John."

"Alison, I am shocked—shocked and astonished, that you can mention your dear father and that—that individual together!"

"I think," put in Alison, timidly—"I think my father would have liked Basil. I feel sure he would. The men at the Tower all like him."

"Yes, as a toy—something to amuse them! All men like to be amused; but your father would not have allowed you to marry him."

"Oh, but he would! indeed, he would! And you will like him, too, when you know him better. May I—don't you think you can trust me to manage this myself, mother? You have always trusted me so much. I've grown used to being trusted by you."

"What, trust a girl who's in love!" exclaimed the widow vehemently.

"He can't be so dreadful as you think, or that wouldn't have happened, I'm sure!" said Alison, with a flush of indignation. "I *couldn't* like a man who hadn't some good qualities. I *couldn't*. You say that you have promised him a note before six," she went on, after a pause. "Let me write it. And, presently, Uncle John will take it over to the Tower for us. Supposing I say something like this: 'Please let me know at what time to-morrow you can come over to the Trinity Square Gardens. I am often there between five and seven.' There, now, won't that do? You will have us under your maternal eye, without being annoyed by our actual presence."

"You cannot give him up?" asked Mrs. Bayliss with despair, looking into her daughter's face with the most intense anxiety.

Alison buried her face in her mother's bosom. "Oh, mother, why do you ask? You know so much about all this; why do you ask? Yes, I can—I can give him up, if I must; but," she whispered, and the words seemed to come straight from her heart, without the medium of voice—"when I do give him up, I shall be giving up my very own life too!"

* * * * *

The little note was written, but Basil was asked to come to the house, not to the Gardens; "for," said Mrs. Bayliss, "if you must meet at all, you had better meet here." John Harbuckle was sent over with it. It was almost a pity his sister did not go with him, so reassuringly English and commonplace did the room in which John Harbuckle found Basil Penrose at work appear.

The old bachelor went up the nice, clean modern-antique staircase, that wound round and round the neat stone hewel, to the open door of the large vaulted upper room, so trim and tidy, with the vivid green fern leaves sprawling on the carpet, the checked red and blue table-cloth, the green wire stand before the embrasures, the blooming scarlet geraniums, and the yellow musk. Basil was remarkably orderly about his work. As John Harbuckle entered, a few sheets of paper, covered with abstruse calculations, were the only evidences of business; but on those figures Basil was engaged with the most absolute concentration.

The day was warm, the door stood open. John Harbuckle waited quietly for a moment, looking at that strange face, of which he could clearly see the profile, as it bent over the paper across which the quick fingers of the wonderful hand were moving. What power, what imperial determination to conquer the problem before it, every

down-bending line of that face expressed! And the man himself appeared as absorbed as lost, in his work as if—"As if," thought John Harbuckle, his memory running back to the days of his own youth and his lost Jessie—"as if there were no Alison in the world! Is it possible that man is in love with my sweet girl? Or is this power over himself the mark of supreme genius?"

"Penrose!" he said, in his slow, gentle intonation.

Basil sprang up with a start. He turned his face with eagerness towards his visitor. John Harbuckle fancied that a kind of glow overspread his features, as if the sunlight had suddenly fallen upon them.

"You have something for me?" he said, holding out his hand.

John Harbuckle fumbled leisurely in his pocket, found the little note, gave it to Basil, and subsided slowly into a cheap easy-chair, covered with American cloth. Basil opened the note and read it. John Harbuckle, during the instant or two this operation

took, made up his mind, which was a remarkably clear one on the whole, that Basil was really most deeply in love; and that his previous concentration on his work was due to that self-command that marked the supreme genius. "One reads of such things; but hardly believes them when one sees them!" he said to himself.

Basil turned to his desk, and rapidly wrote a few words. A light breeze came in from the open casement, and wafted the homely fragrance of the blossoming musk to John Harbuckle—another simple, reassuring incident.

"You will give this to Her?" said Basil, handing John Harbuckle the reply, putting into the last pronoun an expression that sounded almost like religious reverence.

"I will," returned John Harbuckle gravely, and rose to leave.

Basil went with him to the outer gate of the Tower. "I suppose her mother saw that note?" he asked, as they walked slowly along, side by side.

"I presume so; indeed, I may say she did see it. My sister is, as you are doubtless aware, a woman of decided opinions."

"She takes the line of armed neutrality then, I suppose?"

"Apparently," said the judicious John.

"That will suit me as well as any other line," said Basil. "And you will see that Alison isn't worried?"

"Yes; I will see to that," assented John Harbuckle.

"Thanks." Then smiling, as they were parting, "You shall have your reward, Mr. Harbuckle; you shall see me humbly trying to walk in sweet Alisonian ways."

"And very good ways they are, too—very good ways!" said Uncle John. "You have my best wishes, Penrose!"

"I always kept clear of 'isms' and 'ites,' until I met her," Basil added. "Now I must frankly confess myself an Alisonite."

CHAPTER V.

BASIL THE ALISONITE.

Alison and Basil were definitely engaged, with the knowledge and sanction, if not the approval, of Mrs. Bayliss. They met every evening for an hour in the drawing-room, and began laying plans for the future with great earnestness. Basil left off speaking of "my work," or "my research," or "my little invention," or "my pot-boiler" (the invention), always using "our" for "my." And when Alison managed, with great fear and trembling, to tell him of the novel (though not of its *raison d'être*), that was "ours," too.

"I expected to be scolded for trying to scribble," said Alison, most delightfully surprised.

"I shall never scold you, darling," said Basil, "except for one thing."

"I'm so glad, for I can't bear being scolded; it kills me to be scolded; and that one thing you will never have to complain of," said Alison, thinking he was referring to some future lessening in her love for him.

"I mean," said he, "I shall never scold you, as long as you don't try to copy other people. It is the Alisonosity of Alison that charms me, don't you see! Of course, I'm hardly conceited prig enough to hope that Alison cares for me simply because I'm Basil."

"She does, though! That's just what she does!" Alison returned, with an entirely irresistible mingling of naïve frankness and shyness.

Ah! how perfectly happy those two seemed in the brief hours, when they used to meet in the old-fashioned drawing-room, at John Harbuckle's house on Tower Hill! I say "seemed," for one of them knew the

precipice on the brink of which they stood, and, too often, looked down, shuddering, into the fathomless abyss beneath.

Two or three days after the little note had been sent to the Salt Tower, Alison received a long letter from Jessie. It was a good deal longer than most of Jessie's effusions, and much more serious. After a few lines about herself and Mac, she wrote :—

"The sister of that man we met at the Tower is here, staying with Lady Birrendale. She is the very opposite to her brother; she is an angel; the most wonderful creature I have ever seen. I can't tell you what a lovely face and voice she has, although she is quite small. Her mother was a Greek. Her name is Mariora; she must be like a Greek girl, too, I am sure. I can't describe to you the loveliness of her colour; it is so like a flower's bloom (everybody makes this remark); and the deepest carnations are what go best with it; it is so rich and

exquisite. And she has dark hair—just one mass of little crisp waves—and it overshadows her brows. But in the midst of all this southern beauty, there is set the most enchanting little English nose imaginable; it doesn't quite turn up, but it seems as if it had a great mind to do so. It is the oddest contrast to everything else about her. She is good as a saint, and as unworldly. Everything one reads about in the New Testament is quite real to her; but for all that, she is charming to talk to, and just a girl. She must be a good deal younger than her brother. She was here to lunch yesterday; we went out in the grounds together, and (I do hope, Alison, I haven't done wrong) somehow I mentioned having met that man of the name of Penrose, at the Tower, and she claimed him for her brother, and I'm afraid I let my silly tongue run on a good deal. You should have seen her face change, my dear! You should have seen her smile die away! But she never said a word.

"Now, be warned in time, Alison; do, do, pray, be careful! I'm a much better judge of people than you are. I am sure—CERTAIN" (doubly underlined) "although I never had a brother myself, that a sister doesn't look like Mariora Penrose looked, without some very great cause. If ever I saw grief and pity in any woman's face, I saw it in hers when I spoke of her brother and you.

"Why can't you and auntie come and stay somewhere about here? It would be very pleasant for all of us, and, indeed, you *must* make an effort to get away from that man. Don't be angry with me for writing so plainly; I wouldn't, if I weren't so fond of you. Poor Mariora looked so heart-broken that, to comfort her, I had to go with them to the meeting at Allarbie, where she sang "The Ninety and Nine" with such pathos, that it was as much as I could do to keep myself from crying.

"I have been making myself dreadfully miserable about you, ever since I saw you

with that horror. He makes me think of Wriothesley, who racked Anne Askew with his own hands in your Tower. He is quite capable of doing such a thing. If he should happen to do it to you I am afraid Mac will say, 'Serves her right.' I don't suppose any warning from me will be of the slighest use; but if you had seen Mariora's expression, you would, at least, be careful.

"Mariora has produced a wonderful effect on poor Alec. He is quite roused up. He never before did himself justice; in fact, I consider you have never yet seen him. He has grown so sweet. It is all I can do to keep him from rushing up to London, so anxious is he to come and tell you about his new experience. The way in which he has been trying to get up all the subjects that interest you would move the heart of a broom-stick. I shan't be able to hold him back much longer, so you may expect to find him any day, laying sheaves of reports on the East End, etc., at your feet.

"My people-in-law are delightfully kind. They really are a nice family to marry into; still, I need you dreadfully; but that's nothing!"

Alison received this very disquieting letter by the last post. It kept her awake the greater part of the night. The first feeling it aroused was extreme contempt for Jessie—Jessie, who was so perfectly contented with her Mac. What could Jessie possibly know about such a being as Basil Penrose? Her silly little warnings were simply ludicrous. Yet, once again, the deep-toned inner presage that she had heard on that empty day after Jessie's wedding, when she had come suddenly face to face with Herself, reverberated through her being. But Jessie's wise advice—the way she was playing the young married woman, were ludicrous, simply ludicrous!

"Except me, no one understands him! I alone, I am the only one whom he choses should understand him!" So the greater other people's ignorance, the higher her

own inestimable privilege. "I alone; I out of all the whole world!" And as for the sister's distress, she was distressed—of course, she was, being herself so earnest a Christian—at her brother's want of faith. That, again, was because even Mariora did not understand her brother. How could she? Had Mariora seen him transformed as she herself had seen him? She, Alison, was sure there was a real, true faith—the thing itself, in spite of the want of its form —somewhere deep down in his heart.

There undoubtedly was faith in the Basil of Alison's imagination, for she endowed him with some of her own; she saw, moreover, not only the Basil that was, but the Basil she meant to make him. There would be plenty of faith, and of every other good quality in him, before she had been in his life very long. This was a thing that must be; that was simply inevitable. Had she not already seen the difference in him under her influence? Oh, the love we all have for our own images! What is

there in all the universe so dear, so infinitely precious and soothing to us, as ourself reflected in another ?

Alison talked to herself for hours about that letter before she went to sleep; it was disquieting; not that it made her doubt Basil in any way, but that, although it was so absurd, it started such an endless train of arguments; arguments, too, that never could be made clear to a girl who was perfectly content with a Mac Carruthers —with Mac, who could only shoot and fish, and just get along as a good, honest, simple-hearted, affectionate fellow, but who was as different "from my Basil—mine! —as a rush-light from the sun. And I shall write to Jessie to-morrow, and tell her we are engaged, and that she is not to let Alec come here." Which she did; but when it came to the part of the letter about Alec, it was wonderful how much explanation she found necessary. "I am deeply grieved to hurt his feelings," she wrote, in conclusion; "but I cannot take

any blame to myself in the matter." She paused a long while over this sentence before she added, "He was kind and good to me, and I am grateful to him now, as I always was. And I am so glad that Mariora has done him good."

She posted this as soon as it was written, for fear she might change her mind; but Jessie's letter rankled in her heart all day; and so did the little anecdote her mother had related about Hugh Merriman, the young Guardsman, who still so gallantly clung to his faith in Basil as the Coming Man, in spite of being dropped as a hot copper. The thing only wanted explaining, Alison felt, then it would appear that Basil had acted from motives too high for the simple-minded soldier to fathom.

"So you and Hughie Merriman have had a quarrel?" Alison began that evening, after the usual very affectionate greeting; not liking to speak too soon about Mariora.

"Not at all," said Basil promptly. "He

came up to my turret in the middle of the day while I was hard at work, yawning, and saying he was bored to death. The idea of a man being bored in the E.C. district, or, in fact, anywhere in a world like this, that's as crammed full of interests as ever it can be! Yes, Alison, that fellow actually came up to my turret and yawned! So I said to him: 'Look here, Merriman, I took you for a man, but I find you are only a Guardsman; you are intercepting my only ray of light!' So he went, and I've not seen him since. That's the end of the story."

"I am afraid you hurt him, Basil. He made a hero of you," said Alison, reprovingly.

"Oh, he's only one of many, very many," said Basil carelessly.

"You are in the habit, then, of throwing over your friends?" asked Alison, a little anxiety stealing into her voice.

"It isn't that," said Basil. "But a lot of fellows think they can keep up with me,

when they can't. I am a rather rapidly progressive being, that's all. You wouldn't have me crawl in the race of life, I suppose, just because a dozen or so of Merrimans want to yawn along with me?"

"No, no, of course not! Only—" her tone asked, "what is to become of me when you pass me by?"

But there was no need to speak the words; Basil's quick ear heard them unuttered. "As if it would not take me several milleniums to catch you up, my Alison!" he exclaimed fervently, seizing her hand, and covering it with kisses. "Shall I write Merriman a nice letter, darling?"

"Do, Basil. I don't like any one to be hurt."

"I will. I dare say he has learned the lesson I meant to teach him well by this time. One must be sharp with one's pupils, at times."

"Good Basil!" said Alison, with a smile that might have been reward enough

for the most heroic deed of self-sacrifice. "Good Basil!"

"Command me, darling, command me! You shall see how far I can carry obedience. *Ich dien* is my motto from this day forth! But don't be too hard on me, Alison!"

He still held her hand, the hand that Jessie used to say was as slight as egg-shell china. As he uttered the last words he looked down upon it, with the same intent scrutiny she had seen him fix on his work in the Bell Tower.

"I am trying to find out where you keep your severity," he said gravely.

"My severity, Basil! as if I had any! As if easy-goingness were not my besetting sin!"

"And you don't know that severity is your strongest point?" he asked, under his voice.

"I know it isn't! I wish it were!"

"I wish it were *not*. I'm afraid of it. You are the most severe person I ever met."

Alison looked at him; he was still bending over her hand, as if it were the book of Fate—an unpitying, relentless Fate. Again Alison felt that strange fear of him, which even her love, that she hoped was perfect, had never quite cast out.

"The very school children impose upon me," she said, trying to speak lightly, but faltering a little.

"Alison," said Basil, with a stern gravity, "you are the only being, human or otherwise, I have ever feared. I am terribly afraid of you!"

"You are frightening me! Of course you don't—you can't mean it. No one was ever afraid of me! What do you see so dreadful in my hand?"

"Only what I knew before—only what I read in every line of your face, in your eyes, in your voice, in you. I am afraid of you!"

His voice dropped, quivering; he turned slightly away from her, as if unable to meet her wondering gaze. Much moved,

Alison gently put out the hand he was not holding, as if to soothe and comfort him. He seized it fervently, and covered it with passionate kisses.

Alison was so moved that she forgot to speak about Mariora. She forgot all else in all the world except Basil, and how much he loved her—with what passionate, tender reverence.

Evening after evening, they sat together for the allotted time. It occurred once or twice to Alison that it was strange Basil never asked her to go out into the Tower Gardens with him; she had been so used to seeing Mac and Jessie there. She half expected, every time he came, that he would suggest that they should go over the same familiar ground. But he never showed the slightest wish to go out with her. Generally, when he arrived he looked overtired and needing rest. He was fond of telling her of the day's work. It seemed to Alison that the short hour he spent with her must be the only lull in his busy life.

"The quantity of work I've turned out since I felt you were mine, is delightfully astonishing to me!" he often said. "I have been afraid, now and then, it could hardly be up to the mark, so much easier work of all sorts has seemed lately; but whenever I test it, I find it perfectly solid, as far as it goes. It is 'ours' instead of merely mine; that is how I account for the difference."

That is how he accounted for it—to her always, to himself only sometimes. Sometimes he tried to convince himself, that even if he had not seen that vision on Tower Hill, just after he and Alison had parted at the gate of the Gardens, the same fury for work, for getting his work done, would have possessed him. He would, he felt, so have worked for love, if terror had not driven him—if he had not been goaded to desperation by the fear of losing Alison.

And Alison often felt anxious about him; he looked at times so pale and so over-

worked. In August, too, when every one else was supposed to be taking a holiday, still he never paused, except for the little hour he spent with her every evening.

"Do you never take a holiday, Basil?" she asked one evening.

"Every day, when I come here!" he replied. "Du bist die Ruh! Thou art my rest, thou little dear one." Then, in a lighter tone, he went on, "By-the-by, *you* must be wanting a holiday."

"Oh no!—although mother is most anxious to take me to Scotland!"

"Then go! Do go!" said Basil, quite eagerly.

Alison opened her eyes wide. "Tired of me, already?" they seemed to ask.

"No, no, don't go!—unless it would do you good."

"I should meet your sister; that would be an inducement to go," said Alison.

"Then, don't go," said Basil, with decision.

"But why? Your father wishes me to meet her."

"I don't wish it. I love you, Alison, just as you are. I don't want any one to change you! I dread the influence of others over you; I should hate even the shadow of any one else to come between us. I must have you all to myself," cried Basil, vehemently.

"Tell me about your sister," said Alison. Then checking herself, she added, "that is, don't tell me, if it is painful to you; not unless you quite like to tell me."

"It is painful; but I do quite like to tell you everything. My sister and I have done with each other."

"Oh, Basil, how can you say such a fearful thing!" exclaimed Alison, with horror. "Brothers and sisters are always brothers and sisters."

Basil shrugged his shoulders.

"But tell me about her," Alison continued. "Jessie has met her several times, and says she is too lovely for words to describe."

"That's true," said Basil, curtly.

"And an angel of goodness," Alison went on.

"She's mad! mad as a hatter! I'm sorry, poor little chap; for, at one time, she was the only being in the world I was fond of! Poor little chap!"

"I have often wondered how brothers and sisters feel towards each other," put in Alison dreamily. "I never had a brother."

"So much the better for you, my sister would say."

"I don't think so! Indeed, I am sure sisters never think that."

"Well, never mind. When I was a little chap, and she was a littler chap, we were always getting into scrapes together, and doing the maddest things. We used to go on pilgrimages. We were always going out and getting lost. We had illusions about Greece, and brigands, and mountains. One of the first things I did when I grew up, was to go out there, and smash up that illusion. That's the way

I treat all my illusions. I go tapping about to find whether they can't be smashed, and if they're smashable, I smash them. I don't allow myself illusions of any kind. Once, when we were little, and were staying in Bloomsbury with the parents, we wandered down to the Greek church that used to be in London Wall, and we lost ourselves, and were taken to a police station. That sort of thing is all very well while you're children; afterwards, it doesn't work. We don't speak now. Poor little chap, she's quite mad!"

"Are you cruel?" asked Alison, with a contraction of her brows that looked like pain.

"Never, willingly. I do what I have to do; that is all. If I have to do what hurts another person, why, of course, that other person has to be hurt. You think that sounds shocking; but it's only just the same as every one else does. How should we be able to drive on to success if we stop to count the probabilities of driving

over a score or two of fellow mortals? The thing is, to be certain you are going the right road, and then to drive on. Now, you are driving with me, however; you'll be able to call out when you see any one in danger of being run over; and I give you my word, I'd rather not hurt them, if they will only get out of our way."

So it ended, as far as words went, in banter and renewed love-making. But Alison made up her mind that she would never rest satisfied, until she had made up the difference between Basil and his sister: "My sister," as Basil said, "who goes about the world, making much worse trash than that we heard from Madame Herzog, appear beautiful in the ears of poor wretches who don't know good from evil."

"I told Mariora of your engagement to her brother," wrote Jessie, a few days after Alison and Basil had had this talk. "She said nothing. She has given me no message for you. She has expressed no wish to see you. We missed her for an

hour or more. When she reappeared, any one could tell she had been crying. I was obliged to let Mac break the news to Alec. Mac says Alec was very brave, and made no sign. I cannot congratulate you. I love you too much to do so."

"The blindness of every one, except myself!" said Alison, when she read this. But, although she said it, the written words had been read by her; they sank into her heart very deeply. It was saddening. She was determined to make peace between Basil and Mariora.

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE CHURCH OF THE ENGLISH MARTYRS.

The autumn waned; the plane trees in the gardens on Tower Hill shed their leaves, and flowers for the Saturday Flower Mission grew scarce. Still the hamper from Muirhead came as regularly as the day; but it came to the schoolroom, and not to Alison. She saw it, week after week; she never touched one blossom herself. When her pleasant work was over, and she was returning, she sometimes wondered why Basil did not come to meet her. She always expected to see him crossing towards her, on her way home, as she had met him that day when she had seen him so suddenly transfigured at sight of her—that day on which they had given each other their

troth. It was strange; she never met him by chance anywhere out of doors. Well, now the days were growing so short, the light was too precious for him to spend in running after her, she said. Yet she wondered, sometimes, how a man as active as Basil was, could do without plenty of outdoor exercise. She did not know what hours Basil frequently spent, after he had left her of an evening, in walking about the East London streets, in and out courts and alleys, among great blocks of model dwellings, along waterside thoroughfares, down gloomy lanes leading to the river; walking always with that swift movement which she knew so well, but with a seeking look in his face that would have been strange to her had she seen it. If he was seeking the vision that had so startled him, on the day he and Alison had parted at the gate of the Tower Garden, he never found it. Yet, one Saturday afternoon, as Alison was returning from the Flower Mission, it so fell out that a sudden shower

drove her into the beautiful church which the Roman Catholics built, a few years ago, in honour of their English martyrs; the church which stands, within a little, on the site of that East Minster or Abbey of Our Lady of Grace, founded by Edward III., "inflamed with love for Jesus Christ Himself, and Our Ladye, His most beloved Mother, Mary." It stands now in a very wretched neighbourhood, behind the Royal Mint.

Into this new church of Pugin's Alison went, and sat down near the door, rather wearily, for she had been up and down many long flights of stairs that afternoon. Presently she became aware of a kneeling figure in a dim corner not far from her. It was a sob that made her notice the figure. She looked, and saw a woman's form shaken with weeping; she looked longer, and recognized the rich tawny hair, and the shoulders that seemed so burden-worn, although the face was buried in the hands.

"I must speak to her," said Alison, who regarded every sorrowing creature as part of her Mission.

She knelt down, silently praying for help; then rose, and went to where the other was weeping with a weeping that seemed as if it could never cease, except with life. Alison laid her hand on the kneeling woman's trembling shoulder.

"Can I help you in any way?" she asked gently.

The other sprang up wildly. Her hair was pushed back from her tear-stained face; she was terribly altered, but still Alison was sure she was the same woman whom she had met on Tower Hill, muttering to herself about her false, false lover.

"What do you want with me?" she demanded fiercely.

"I want to help you if I can," said Alison, with a quiet tone of command.

"You may well say, if you can! No one can help me—except God; and He won't!" said the other defiantly, putting

her clenched hands to her eyes, and roughly scooping out the tears.

"Oh, don't talk like that! Pray, don't!" said Alison; and laying her own hand on the other's arm, she tried to draw her towards one of the benches. "Sit here, now," she said. "It is about a lover, this trouble of yours. I know it is; I heard you say so."

"Ay! a lover—a lover—a false, false lover!" the other went on, as if beside herself. "But you needn't think evil of me for that! I know what you're thinking! Do you suppose I don't know? But you're wrong for once! Oh, yes, I know who you are; I've seen you about here many a time; but you're wrong about me! What's the good of talking to you? You wouldn't believe me—not you!"

"I will believe you," said Alison, earnestly. "Tell me your story. I will believe you, for I saw how you had cared for that poor little dead baby I brought the wreath for. You remember seeing me in that room, don't you?"

"Remember, remember—as if I could ever forget anything! As if my poor brain wasn't burnt up with remembering!" cried the other wildly.

"And you have been so good to the poorest and most wretched! You don't mind what slums you go into; you are always helping people. And yet"—looking up at her with a strange mingling of pity and respect—"and yet you must be poor—very poor, yourself!"

"Poor enough, God knows!" said the other, as she sat down near Alison, with her elbow in her knees and her head bowed on her hand.

"Have you no friends?—a father? a mother, perhaps?" asked Alison gently.

"Both!—and good one's—and a good home too, if I could only go to it. But I can't; they'd never believe me!"

"But tell me, now," said Alison eagerly —"tell me about them. I might be able to write to them; I've been so fortunate with my letters for people. Do tell me."

The other shook her head with decision. "They would never believe me!" she repeated mournfully. "I'd die sooner than see them, while they're thinking evil of me."

"But they would believe you, I'm sure! Why, *I* believe what you are saying! Let me write to them, and tell them just the simple truth. They live in the country, don't they? Trust me with your story; I'll make them believe it. You are ill—not fit to be without some one to look after you. Where do they live?"

"Where *he* used to live," she said, with bitter emphasis. "And he was a gentleman—called one, any way. And I was going to be married to as respectable a young man as there was in the place," she went on hurriedly, "and that other, he came; and he turn my head, and he make me think he was going to marry me. And he come up to London. And he make me promise to follow him. I was forced to follow him; there was a something drawing me, and

drawing me, till I was forced to go. And he was glad to see me, he said; but he was all false—all false, and getting married didn't mean with him the same as with other people. And he wanted to be married his way; but I knew it was wrong, his way was; and I stood him out, I did, though I was all alone in London; I stood him out, and I never married him any way at all. I left him at once, with ten shillings in my pocket."

"Then why not go back home? Why not? What grief your parents must have endured! Do, do tell me where they live! I'm sure I can make it right again. Do tell me! Why shouldn't you go home?"

The other one rose hastily. Alison caught hold of her dress, fearing she might rush away, out of the church, without leaving any clue by which she might trace her.

"Tell you? Tell you where my parents live! Why, that would be telling you

who *he* is! No, no! It's nearly come to an end now! He's nearly killed me; and there's rest in the grave—plenty of it! When I'm gone, you'll know there's been another woman tortured to death. What's one among so many?"

"Oh, but you needn't die! Surely, you need not!" cried Alison. "Only let me help you! I have so many friends who would like to help you! Why need you refuse their help, when you have tried so hard to help others?"

"Only to keep myself from sinking! That's all! Only to keep myself from turning into a demon! But that's all over now! I've seen him with another woman. I saw them together in the distance, only for an instant, turning the corner; but I knew him. I knew what they were talking about. He means to marry her; but he shall not! I swore to him, when we parted, that he should never marry another while I'm alive. And he shall not—he shall not! I swore he should not, and I'll

keep my oath. I'll kill him; I'll kill her! If I can't, I'll kill myself! I'll never live in the same world as that man and his wife!"

The woman had risen up in fury and madness, and made as if she would go. Alison clutched at her dress to detain her, looking up into the wild face, her own heart stirred to its depths with pity and indignation. Wrecks as they were, that face and form still showed they had been grand.

"Oh, be brave! Be brave to the end! And do, do let us help you!" "Be brave still, for Christ's sake!" pleaded Alison.

"If ever I see them together, I'll kill them! I'll kill them both!" the other repeated furiously, too desperately full of her own wrong to notice Alison's words. "Let me go! Let me go! I will go!" And with a sudden twist, she wrenched herself away, and hurried out of the church.

Alison was so stunned, that she sat still

in amazement for a minute or two. She could hardly believe that she was awake, that what had happened had been real. Then she went quickly to the church door; but the other was already out of sight. Alison threw herself on her knees, and prayed with all her soul, rising at last with a feeling as of physical illness. The shower was over; Alison went home. She walked slowly, for the interview in the church had quite unnerved her. She was later home than usual; Basil had been there, perhaps, ten minutes, when she arrived. When she entered the room, he was standing by the mantelpiece, with a cup of tea in his hand, and Mrs. Bayliss was sitting, apparently in a very good temper, at a little Chippendale table, on which were a tray and teapot of a delicate Wedgewood, much prized by John Harbuckle.

During the last ten minutes, Basil had made great progress with Mrs. Bayliss. She had even admitted to herself that there was a certain interest about him. "A

diabolic interest," she had always allowed him to possess; but she was now almost prepared to allow him a human interest.

"Alison, dear child, how tired you look!" said Mrs. Bayliss, as her daughter came in.

"I am rather tired, mother," said Alison.

Then Basil met her, seized both her hands, and looked at her with intense anxiety before he kissed her. He placed the arm-chair for her, and at once went for the cup of tea Mrs. Bayliss had poured out.

"Darling, you are not ill, are you?" he whispered eagerly.

"No, Basil dear. Oh no!" she returned wearily. "Only a little tired—and—a great deal sad. Oh—" very much under her voice—"so sad! So very sad!"

"You are sure you are not going to faint?" asked Mrs. Bayliss.

"Quite sure," said Alison, forcing a smile and sipping her tea.

"Then, I think," said Mrs. Bayliss, "I

will just take Uncle John another cup up to his den."

"I've been making love to your mother most successfully!" said Basil, as the door was closed behind Mrs. Bayliss. "I am rapidly becoming quite a commonplace person! Dearest, what has made you so sad?" anxiously.

"Oh, life is so hard, terribly, terribly hard, to—to——"

"To people who live east of Tower Hill?" put in Basil, trying to speak easily, but failing. It was his anxiety for her, Alison thought, that made him look so pale and so earnest, as he put the question.

"Yes," said Alison, simply and sadly.

"You are sure you are not troubled about me? Have I said or done anything I shouldn't have done? Have I worried you in any way?"

"No; oh no! only—" she shuddered; he fancied she shrank from him a little.

"Yes, dear?"

"Don't looked so scared, Basil; I'm all

right. It was merely an attack of too much sympathy, as you would put it."

"Well, then, by way of change, try to rejoice with those that rejoice, and let me tell you that to-day I have had a visit from my 'Mr. Dives,' my millionaire, you know. He saw my little invention in the Bell Tower. It took him rather by surprise. He would hardly believe it was my own, and I didn't feel justified in telling him that you had been the inspirer. Your influence is too precious a pearl to cast to swine. He wants educating up to it a little; but I think I shall bring him on quickly. If so, must we wait until the Spring? Why not spend a golden winter abroad? I'm tired of the Tower—of London—of England!"

And while Basil gave Alison, at great length, and with much detail, a sketch of his day's business, and of his plans for the future—the near, very near future—the golden winter that he proposed they should spend together—the Church of the

English Martyrs gradually faded from her memory.

"You will make me a golden winter, won't you, my Alison? You won't make me wait till the Spring, will you?"

Alison smiled a gentlest smile of assent from the innermost love of her heart. "A golden winter!" she murmured dreamily, "A golden winter!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE CHAPEL OF ST. JOHN.

"A GOLDEN WINTER! Our golden winter!" said Basil to Alison. "Why wait for a nipping English spring?"

Alison did not see any reason why; she said all must rest with Basil.

"And Mr. Dives," added Basil. "I think, though, I can answer for Mr. Dives; his faith in me is developing with extraordinary rapidity."

But it seemed that, even in London, in Trinity Square, there was to be a golden winter that year, so glorious the sunsets, so brilliant the noon-tides.

Still, every morning, Alison worked away at her work, as earnestly as if her daily bread depended upon it. The money

it would bring in—for she was still sure it would bring in something; perhaps, even a large something—would not be needed for Basil's work. Indeed, she could not help smiling at her own folly in once having fondly imagined that it could have been of use in that way. But now, it was to buy something for Basil himself, something he should always have, that would last all their lives. She worked hard, too, at her book, because she had grown to love it very much; all her characters were so real to her now. But she was certainly astonished to find how many pages of manuscript were required to fill three volumes, and how very long some of those pages took to write. It seemed, as she surveyed the pile of manuscript when she added a chapter to it, that the given quantity could never be achieved; for she was possessed of a painful love of accuracy in details that gave her infinite trouble; and, unfortunately, instead of having placed the scene of her story in London, where she could easily have

verified any statement, she had placed it in Birrendale, which, with Alec at Muirhead, she felt she could not visit just then. When she began to write, she had fancied she knew every stick and stone of that country-side by heart. But when she came to put it on paper, all sorts of details escaped her; she could not be sure of them. But Basil had so impressed her with the sinfulness of inaccurate work (never having written a line of fiction himself) that she wearied her brains dreadfully in trying to remember the exact form or colour or sound of what she was describing, sometimes to the great detriment of the book, as a whole.

One morning, not long after the scene in the Roman Catholic church, Alison was up in Uncle John's den, trying her hardest to recall a Birrendale conversation, that she wished to render with the true local flavour, which was growing rather Londonish under her treatment; when, almost as if it had been part of the scene, there came, penetrating through the closed windows,

and above the City's roar, a sound, a Scotch sound. It went with her thoughts so exactly, that, for a moment, she hardly noticed it. Then, with a sudden, startled expression, as if she had been hurried back to Tower Hill from beyond the broad Borders, she sprang up and threw open the window. Above the deep bass of the noontide traffic, above the noisy hoof-scrapings of the heavy horses in the shafts of the bonded carmen's vans, above the multitudinous voices of the City and river, rose the bright melody of—

"Where ha' you been all the day,
Bonnie lassie, Hieland laddie?"

"The Scot's Guards have come!" Alison cried, with a sudden wild delight, as she caught a glimpse of the scarlet coats streaming over Tower Hill. She ran downstairs as quickly as her feet would carry her, calling out at the top of her voice: "Mother! mother! The Scot's Guards have come!"

At the very same moment, Mrs. Bayliss

put her head out of the drawing-room door, and called: "Alison! Alison! The Scot's Guards have come!"

Laughing, the mother and daughter ran up to the topmost window of the house, as if they were a couple of school-girls, and watched the gleam of scarlet crossing the bridge over the Tower Moat. How bright that scene looked from their window, high up above Tower Hill! The day was superb; a brilliant noon-tide in early winter, in which every line and every bit of colour told. On the top of the hill the pavement gleamed white, the fresh turf in the Gardens green, the bare trees, with their fairy network of branch and twig, showed a sweet blending of browns and purples; while beyond, at the hill's foot, the great Tower of London stood in the airy beauty of grey—grey, as seen in a fine noon in winter, when the dry touch of frost is on it. The gold of the crowns and pennants of Time itself, as marked on the clock of the White Tower, shone

and glittered in the sun; a red flag floated gaily in the breeze on the Tower's roof, far above the slight open belfry of the little church on the fatal green. There were masts and funnels, and wreaths of steam over the river; there were light mists among the Tower battlements; there was the ceaseless noise and stir and clatter of the traffic of the great City; but, above all, as the scarlet coats streamed across the Moat and disappeared under the dark arch of the Byward Tower, there was "Hieland Laddie" reaching them in fitful gusts.

"How I wish you were going to marry a soldier, Alison!" exclaimed Mrs. Bayliss, with enthusiasm, as she watched the show. "Or, if you had only been a boy, so that we could have made a soldier of you!"

"Ah, I always was such a disappointing person!" said Alison, with a mock sigh.

Mrs. Bayliss gave her daughter, around whom she had thrown one arm, a fond little squeeze. "You are a sweet thing, dear," she said. "But you haven't that

real love and enthusiasm for the Service that I have—that your father's daughter should have?"

"Oh, I don't know! This sort of thing just turns my head; it's so gay, and I'm fond of the soldiers, of course; but——"

"Oh! Not half enough, child," cried Mrs. Bayliss, beating time to "Hieland Laddie" with her foot. "'Bonnie lassie! Hieland Laddie.'" Ah! that ought to be you and Alec."

"Yes," retorted Alison gaily, "seeing I'm a born Londoner, and he's a Borderer, and that I ought to have married a soldier half a minute ago! Oh, mother, mother! why didn't *you* marry that dear little Major Merriman yourself last year? What a pity! Oh, what a pity! And he was so desperately in love too!"

Mrs. Bayliss sighed, and then looked pleased, as she always did when the episode of the Major was alluded to.

"But, Alison, you don't really care for the soldiers!" she said presently.

"Yes I do, mother; but, to be perfectly candid, and altogether shocking, I can never quite forget the fundamental disgrace to humanity involved, or, rather, underlying the whole system."

"What a Penrosean sentence! Disgraced! Good heavens, child! Honour and glory, I should say. More Penrose heresy?"

"Oh dear no! I've thought this out for myself. Of course, if humanity was what it ought to be, it could not possibly go to war; and it *must* be a disgrace not to be what we ought to be—don't you see that?"

"Don't I see that you are an insane little goosie!" returned Mrs. Bayliss, greatly excited. "They'll be having service in St. John's Chapel on Sundays now," she went on, after a pause. "I detest the Scotch service, as a rule; but let us stretch a point, and go next Sunday. Perhaps we'll see some one we know. Shall we?"

"What, and leave your parish church?" laughed the wicked Alison.

"Well, just for once! I wonder if Colonel Maxwell has come with them? You remember him, don't you?—Lord Birrendale's brother, don't you know; your father brought him in to lunch one day? We'll go to the Chapel next Sunday, duckie!"

So it was an understood thing that they were to go.

Basil had never yet been to church with Alison. She knew the service at the Tower Chapel would be very short; that was an inducement she might urge, and she set her heart upon getting Basil to go with her. So, when Basil and Alison were together on the Saturday, Alison said—

"We are going to the Tower to service on Sunday, with the Scot's Guards. It will be in St. John's Chapel, and I hear will be very short—only an hour. Don't you think, Basil, you could come too?"

"I know I cannot," returned Basil.

"What, not even to please me? And you are always telling me how much you want to please me!"

"But, darling, I should not please you if I went, don't you see?"

"Yes, but you would! It would be an enormous pleasure to me; you can't imagine what a pleasure it would be to have you with me!"

"What if I were attacked by an incontrollable impulse to demonstrate the absurdity, not to say the——"

"Oh, Basil! You shouldn't talk so! I know it's only chaff; but still——"

"But it isn't chaff! However, if you don't like me to refuse in that way, I'll try another. I can't go with you, because I am already engaged."

"Engaged? Well, I suppose you thought you would not be required to be on duty at that time on Sunday, so I must not be cross with you. To whom are you engaged?"

"To your dearest friend, dearest!"

"My dearest friend! And who is she?"

"She is not she, because she happens to be *he*."

"Uncle John, then? Why, he'll be at chapel at Cannon Street Hotel."

"I had hoped that *I* had the happiness to be my dearest lady's dearest friend! My engagementis with myself," said Basil lightly.

"With yourself! I should have thought you could have put it off, then, for me!" said Alison, as if rather hurt.

"It involves you, or, rather, your interests. Don't you understand yet, darling, that all I do, I do for you? I never do anything for any one else," said Basil, with conviction. "I am going to Sam's to-morrow morning."

"To Sam's! And pray, who is Sam?"

"Well, Sam's is a sort of coffee-house, down a turning out of Houndsditch, where, on Sunday mornings, diamond merchants do congregate, each with his wares set out before him, on his own particular table,

and where I have often picked up stones that are quite good enough for my experiments at a rate that makes it worth my while to go there in search of them. You need not distress yourself by thinking that by so doing, I am encouraging Sabbath-breaking; because these chosen people, as, perhaps, you know, keep their Sunday on Saturday."

"You told me once that I should see how far you could carry obedience," said Alison, turning away from him, her eyes clouding with disappointment.

"And so you shall! But have you laid your commands upon me yet?"

"You know what I wish," said Alison, with further averted face, and dimmer eyes. "I do not care to command on such a subject."

"Command me, and I obey."

Alison shook her head very quickly.

"You are cross? Really, I will obey you! Order me out to church parade, and I will obey."

"No, never mind! It was my fault. I should not have asked you. I am not cross, only just a little disappointment—indeed, bitterly disappointed."

"But why disappointment? Don't you remember me as this?" and he curled himself up on the window-seat into the model of that charming grotesque fiend, around which his clerical ravens were dancing, in the little sketch, so full of insolence and life, that had so dreadfully shocked Mrs. Bayliss, and amused Alison, one memorable evening last summer; the sketch that had made her exclaim, "What a dear fiend!" "You had almost forgotten me as this, hadn't you?"

So it was laughed over and forgotten. Well, not quite forgotten—passed over—not allowed to spoil the Saturday. Only when the silent morrow came, with its strange contrast to the City's noisy week, Alison felt a longing—a longing she had often felt before, but never so strongly as then—that Basil were going with her.

It would come, some day, she told herself. In the meanwhile, there was loneliness where most she would have prized communion.

Just at the last something detained Mrs. Bayliss a few minutes too long.

"Mother, we must be late; there is the band playing for church parade; let us make haste," said Alison, as they hurried over the deserted Tower Hill.

The one bell in the little open belfry, seen so plainly between the old houses on the west wall and Basil Penrose's turret, was still ringing; but as, a few minutes later, the widow and her daughter passed under the dark archway of the Byward Tower, the bell ceased, and they heard the order given to close the outer gates. They walked quickly under the wall of the Queen's House, the gentle chime of the sweet bells of All Hallows, Barking, following them, and reminding Alison of how Basil's music had followed her on that afternoon when she had paused there by

the Traitor's Gate, and had heard the poor mother tell her ragged children that the prisoners were brought in from the river through those fatal portals, and "never went out no more." How quiet it all was now! Even the Barking bells left off their plaintive melody before Alison had turned again to face the broad steps beyond the Bloody Tower. Profoundly peaceful all looked on the Parade Ground, and on the historic Green. There was an English service at St. Peter's—the little church where the headless victims sleep. The drums of the regiment were piled up outside the church, on the worn and nameless tomb under the flint wall. The pet regimental antelope, that had just taken its men to the porch, was quietly returning, with graceful, ambling steps, as if conscious of having done its duty. A girl in a yellow dress was standing at the door of one of the ivy-covered houses. Solemn organ tones filled the little church, and came trembling out into the still air.

This one may see any Sunday morning; but service is only held in St. John's Chapel, within the White Tower itself, under peculiar circumstances; and it was to St. John's that Alison and her mother were now going. Instead, therefore, of crossing the Parade to St. Peter's, they ascended the steps of the White Tower, and there, as they were going up the old rough and narrow stair-case, a Scotch psalm, sung low, by men's voices, came floating down toward them. As that sound, so peculiarly Scotch, so different from any English psalmody, so strangely dream-like as heard among the vast thickness of those Norman walls, reached the widow's ear, she turned to her daughter, put out her black-gloved hands, and laid them on Alison's shoulders, with a pathetic action that compelled her to stop, as well as listen. They looked at each other in silence; their eyes dimmed with the memories of those Birrendale days of happiness and of loss that rushed back to them with such strong

tenderness with the well-remembered psalm tune. It was only for a moment they paused; then they went on, up the narrow stair, grimy with the passage of countless visitors, and quietly entered the Chapel of St. John, then bright with morning sunlight and scarlet uniforms.

The men were standing up, singing, with their backs to the door. In the shadowy west end of the chapel there were two chairs, at a distance from the men, set as if on purpose for the ladies; to these they went at once.

The psalm was finished, the men resumed their seats. Alison saw that she and her mother were the only women present. It was the first time she had ever come upon a company composed entirely of men assembled for worship. The effect upon her was very singular. Alison was, as I have often said, a most humble-minded person; it quite astonished her to find that, when she saw these men going through a religious service without the

sanction and authority of woman's presence, she was filled with strangely mixed feelings, partly at what struck her, instinctively, in spite of all her reason could urge to the contrary, as the absurdity and incongruity of the scene, and partly with a deep sense of reverence, both for them and for their religion, which was not arranged, like the religion of so many men—her own late father's, for instance—merely to *be seen of women.* With many of them, doubtless, the service was no more than part of the day's parade; nevertheless, the fact of a couple of hundred men assembled for worship there before her eyes, without a woman's presence (her mother and herself being only chance visitors) was a very staggering reality to her; so staggering, that it caused a complete revolt of her instinct against her reason and her Christianity. Why? But I will leave the many interesting questions which naturally arise out of this to your leisure, when I have asked, could it have arisen from some

deep-seated conviction, hidden away in her inmost being, that, in spite of all the priest and pastor worship in which women indulge (and from which even Alison had not altogether escaped), Woman is the natural High Priestess of Humanity, without whom it is presumption and folly for Man to approach the Altar? I do not say this is right. I have distinctly asserted it is not reasonable; but I here state, as a fact, that such a conviction sprang out from some hidden recess of Alison's being, when she saw those men assembled for worship in St. John's Chapel; and I ask, why?

But my dear Alison was neither heathen nor Comtist; in far less time than it has taken to put this down, she had driven that strange notion back to its stronghold, and had found her place in her Scotch Bible; for the Scotch, among other national objects, have a national Bible, with their metrical psalms and paraphrases bound up with it. It was a simple, brotherly service

that, and Scotch as Scotch could be. The minister stood up, without even the ordinary gown and bands, read and prayed and preached in his northern accent, like a man among men. "Our hills, our streams," he spoke of in the sermon; taking Alison and her mother back to the North Countrie, even while they sat among the massive columns in the old chapel of our Norman Kings.

Perhaps there is nothing in all the Tower of London that so vividly brings home to one the difficulty with which the conquerors held England, than this same chapel of theirs. The isolation from the outer world, the enormous thickness of the walls—as one sees by the depth of the embrasures, the vast weight of the columns, the heavy round arches of the triforium, all impress their tale of danger and precaution on the mind. The restorer's touch, on column and flooring, give it a certain newness, which clashes with one's dreams of dead and gone Normans and

Plantagenets; but turn to the rough-hewn stone walls, and you will feel at once where you are, in spite of their fresh element.

On the morning of Alison's visit, the sun, gaining strength towards midday, shone through one of the round arched windows, in the embrasure of which were sitting, side by side, a piper in Highland tartan and silver brooch, and a scarlet-coated Guardsman.

"Colonel Maxwell," whispered Mrs. Bayliss to her daughter.

Alison, who had never but once seen the colonel, and then only for a minute or two, had not recognized him. She looked up at her mother's whisper. A ray of sunlight crossed the colonel's scarlet shoulder, and brightened the gold lace of his collar, as he sat in the embrasure, with his open Bible on his knee. Alison felt an intense reverence for him; the grand figure and the open Bible appealed irresistibly to her admiration and piety; but they made her unhappy; they did not belong to Basil.

She could have cried for lack of Basil's presence. What would she have given for the simple joy of having him by her side, each bending over the same book? Was it ever to be? An inner voice said, Never! Yet the service brought comfort to her. When they stood up for the last hymn, the noble paraphrase—

> "Where high the heav'nly temple stands,
> The house of God not made with hands;"

it was to her as if the solid masonry of the chapel, the thick walls and narrow space so crowded with heavy columns, gave way to the limitless heavenly temple, and troublous earthly passion to the eternal love and sympathy of "the Great High Priest, the Saviour and the Friend of man." Never before had the familiar words seemed to her so full of meaning, as when she sang them that morning with the Scot's Guards, in the old Norman chapel.

The brown, close-cropped heads bowed, the minister spread out his hands and gave

the blessing. A minute later, the men were all clattering down the narrow stairs, as fast as they could go.

"We must speak to Colonel Maxwell," said Mrs. Bayliss.

When the men had all streamed out of the Chapel, Alison saw that the colonel had stayed behind, to speak to the minister. But who else was it she saw? What was it that made her flush almost as scarlet as the colonel's uniform? Hidden behind one of the huge columns of the apse, there had been sitting, unperceived by Alison, during the whole service one civilian—a young man with a touch of northern fire in his brown hair; that young civilian had now joined the chaplain and the colonel.

"It is Alec!" whispers Mrs. Bayliss, with a delight she does not care to suppress.

It is indeed Alec, and he sees them; he comes towards them; an instant more, and he and Alison have met.

"Oh," Alison feels, with a sudden rush

of grief, "he and I have worshipped together! and Basil, where is he?" Yet she must needs put out her hand as she meets Alec Carruthers. In spite of Basil Penrose, never before has she felt so near to Alec.

CHAPTER VIII.

ABOVE THE MOAT.

So, in the chapel of the White Tower, Alison and Alec shook hands again, for the first time since the day they had parted in anger at John Harbuckle's door. It was a very trying meeting; the face of each burned with a flush that gave them physical pain. They dared not look at each other as their fingers met and instantly separated. It was the merest touch, but it thrilled through both of them, and made speech impossible. Alison felt for Alec with a terrible keenness. Taught by her own experience, she knew now what she had not realized that day when they had parted, how deeply Alec loved her, how much he must have suffered.

Mrs. Bayliss came promptly to the rescue with questions about Birrendale. Then Alec and Alison heard her talk to the colonel and the chaplain, and presently knew that they were following the others down the narrow winding stairs, and out of doors. Mrs. Bayliss talked on gaily about Birrendale. They heard her voice going on and on, like a voice heard in a dream. Indeed, to Alison it seemed almost as if she had the nightmare, so much did Alec's presence oppress her. As they walked along silently, side by side, both most painfully conscious that they were traversing the ground they had gone over when they had walked back together from the Queen's House, on the day on which Alison had first met Basil Penrose, Alison wondered how Alec could have ventured to come to the Tower again. Alec wondered at himself for having done so; but he had firmly resolved not to allow personal feeling to interfere with his movements, and he had kept to his resolution. Yet he could

not, try as he might, speak a syllable to Alison, much as he wished that the first word should come from him.

"And Jessie—and all of them?" Alison asked at length, very seriously, and under her voice, as if she had met him for the first time after there had been a death in his family.

"They are well," he replied in much the same tone.

Then it seemed as if all had been said. There was a very long and awkward pause while Alison racked her brain for another sentence, and Alec did the same.

"When did you last see Jessie?" Alison presently managed to ask.

"On Friday," was the brief reply.

Another awful pause; then—

"I came south on Friday."

"Are you staying in the Tower?"

"I'm just at our old rooms in Craven Street, for a few days, until I find elsewhere to go."

"Are you with Colonel Maxwell?

because I see, by the *City Press*, that he will be preaching in London for a while."

"I am going with him to a theatre service this evening."

"Mother and I have arranged to hear him at Cannon Street Hotel on Tuesday."

"Ay. Miss Penrose is to sing there. You will have heard her?"

"Is she? No; I've not heard her," exclaimed Alison hurriedly, and with much confusion.

Alec looked at Alison with that curious expression of his, that made his deep-set eyes suddenly show the blue in them. Alison noticed it. Did it mean, why had Basil not told her that his sister was in town?

"She is very wonderful," said Alec with simple gravity.

Then, because of that innate conviction that was so essentially part of her being—the feeling, I mean, that woman is divinely appointed to encourage man in his attempt to climb the difficult, upward way—Alison

must needs say, with a smile, tremulous and shy, but kindly—

"I have heard good news of you. It made me very, very glad."

"Thank you," he said earnestly, but without a smile. Then, after a long pause, he repeated with deeper emphasis, "Thank you!"

By this time they had reached the outer gates, and their elders parting, they followed their example. Alec and Colonel Maxwell went to the officers' quarters, the clergyman to Chelsea Hospital, for another service, Alison and her mother towards home.

"Ah!" said Mrs. Bayliss with a sigh. "That's a dear fellow—a good, dear fellow!" In spite of her regretful sigh, she was pleased that Alec was again on the scene. "A good fellow," she went on emphatically. "The colonel has been telling me about him. I'm sure he spoke of Alec in the most touching way."

Alison said nothing; she was in no mood for discussing Alec; she was far too

much moved by having met him again. They had, however, gone but a few yards, when they saw Basil, who had timed the service pretty accurately, coming swiftly over Tower Hill. She could not help wishing that her mother was not with her just then, for she could not hide the delight that made her heart give a great shout of joy, and her eyes sparkle as they saw him. Mrs. Bayliss, after a very distant greeting, withdrew promptly.

"Let us have a turn in the Tower Gardens. You are much earlier than usual," said Basil, as Mrs. Bayliss departed with stately steps and slow.

"You don't deserve it, Basil!" said Alison. But she offered no opposition as Basil unlocked the gate.

"What's up now?" he asked, as he put the key in his pocket. Then, stopping as they reached the long path above the Moat, he looked keenly at her, with that whimsical brightness of his when pleased.

She smiled. She met his eyes for an

instant, only for an instant. It was in her heart to welcome him back from his absence with endless rejoicing, in spite of the pain his absence had given her; but there was a hurt feeling lingering still, and her face betrayed her, as it always did; the painful flush, too, that had come from meeting Alec, had not quite gone.

"Why did you not tell me your sister was going to sing in the City? Are you hiding Mariora from me?" she asked reproachfully.

Basil's expression changed at once. "I saw you with a lot of people just now. Your mother's old friends?"

"Yes," she said, "hers—and mine," she added with decision.

"And yours!" echoed Basil, walking on to a certain piece of stone coping above the Moat, where there is no protecting wall.

Alison went with him. They stood side by side, quite close to each other; but it seemed to Alison that some strange, impalpable barrier had risen up between

them. They stood together for a few moments in utter silence, looking down into the dry Moat. There was not a creature anywhere about; the outer world was absolutely quiet and deserted. After a moment, Alison raised her eyes to Basil's face. He was gazing steadily into the Moat; all the lines of his face were bent downward, giving him that look of stern, morose imperiousness that Alison had noticed, when first she had seen him, as he turned the winch of the model of the rack at the Queen's House. It was some time since Alison had noticed this expression on his face. His love for her had driven it away. But at that moment, as he stood at the very edge of the coping, just opposite that same Prisoners' Walk on which they had also stood, with the City of London at their feet—at that moment, he looked the very embodiment of inquisitorial relentlessness.

"Your mother's friends and yours! Yours!" he repeated. Then, suddenly, he

turned round to Alison: "If I were to clasp you in my arms and spring over here with you," he said fiercely, a gust of passion sweeping all before it, "we should at least die in each other's arms, for I would hold you to the last!"

"Basil!" Again she felt that cold thrill down her spine.

He turned away quickly from the Moat to her, his face all quivering.

"My darling! My darling! You don't know what love is. No woman does! You cannot imagine how I dread the possibility of losing you."

"But why — why — dread it?" she stammered.

"How can I help it, when I see you influenced by so many others?"

"Influenced! Oh, Basil! Does any one influence me, except you?"

"Yes — every one? You have been influenced this morning—I know it! I hate the shadow of another between us. And Mariora's shadow I more than hate;

I fear. You shall be altered by no one but me. I love you as you are. I have told you so a hundred times. I will not have you altered. I will not have you go to hear Mariora's trash."

"But, Basil," said Alison humbly, "I did not know, when I promised mother to go with her, that your sister was going to sing. I knew you had an engagement for Tuesday, and that I should be very lonely. Mother will expect me to go with her. Several of our Scotch friends will be there. Don't you see, I really must go? Besides, I want to hear your sister sing. I am told she is wonderful."

"Of course she is! And you'll fall at her feet, and grovel like the rest of them! You are the sort of girl to do it."

"Am I? Well, at any rate, I won't grovel to you!" said Alison, now quite determined to have her own way. "I've promised mother to go, and go I will!"

"Oh yes! You have promised your mother; so you have! Of course, your

domestic duties override all other considerations," said Basil, with a distinctly unpleasant hardness in his tone.

"They've had very little consideration lately!" said Alison, holding her head very high.

"Your domestic duties being so imperative, perhaps you would be glad to return to them?" suggested Basil icily.

"Perhaps I had better do so," said Alison as icily.

So they walked back to John Harbuckle's house in stolid silence, and there they parted without a word. It was their first quarrel.

Alison managed—how, she hardly knew—to teach her class as usual, that afternoon. She hoped she should find a note awaiting her on her return; but there was none. She went through the Sunday with outward composure, telling herself there must be a note on Monday. But there was none on Monday, and in the evening there was no Basil. Alison could bear the strain

no longer, but broke down, and stayed upstairs crying, as soon as the time at which, on other days, he always came had passed. She thought she must yield. Yes; she would conquer her pride and be the first to yield. The fault of the quarrel should not be hers. It was his intense love for her that had been wounded; it was right she should yield. But he did not come, neither did she write. She was restless and miserable all night, but there was no note for her on the Tuesday morning. She waited and waited all day; still there was no note, neither had she been able to write. Late on Tuesday afternoon, he came, looking as pale and wretched as he found her.

"Are you going?" were his first words.

"It shall be as you wish," she answered, keeping the distance his tone marked out.

"Then you had better go. Go—and get it over."

"But do you quite—quite like me to go? Because I'll stay at home; I shall

like to stay at home with you. Are you sure you like me to go?"

"Quite sure; I've been demonstrating o myself the folly of beginning what one can't carry out. Of course, you and Mariora must know each other some day; so it doesn't much matter how soon;—only we've been so happy without her, don't you see? And I cannot spare a fraction of your love; I must have it all, to the uttermost. All or none! May I kiss you?" he went on, with very tender humility, falling on his knees. He heard a little suppressed sob as he did so. "Forgive me, dearest! What a fool I've been!" he cried.

"I'm so sorry I——" began Alison penitently.

"I'm not," said Basil. "What I've gone through, only proves how impossible it would be for me to live without you. I don't begrudge the pain now."

"Impossible for me, too," echoed Alison.

And for you, Alison? How many

years has your mother lived without her James Bayliss? How many years has John Harbuckle lived without his Jessie? How impossible those years once would have seemed to both of them when they were young as Basil and Alison, and when two others, two beloved others, were young also.

"And now let us talk about our golden winter, and what we are going to do when Mr. Dives has quite completed his education, which I hope will be by this time the day after to-morrow," said Basil gaily. "What a pupil I've found in Mr. Dives!"

CHAPTER IX.

MARIORA COMES HOME.

THERE was a stir of expectancy at Low Kelvingham Rectory that same bright day on which the Scots Guards had marched into the Tower of London. Mariora was coming home; but the rector, instead of immediately breaking out into Handel, as had been his way of expressing his joy on other occasions when his daughter had returned, went sadly up to his study, and then into the church, where he remained for nearly an hour. A neighbouring clergyman who met him soon afterwards, thought he had grown much older-looking the last week or two. In other days, when Mariora had been returning, even before he had shown himself to his household on the

morning of his daughter's expected coming, Jinny, the little housemaid, as she lighted the fire in the sitting-room, used to hear him pounding away at "See the Conquering Hero comes," which was at once followed by "Honour and Arms!" "He shall dash them!" and "From Mighty Kings!" For when these rare fits of jubilation seized the rector, it made no difference to him whether Handel intended the song for bass, tenor, or soprano. It was Handel, and that, while the fit lasted, was enough for Mr. Penrose. In other days, after breakfast, if he had occasion to cross the field, he would go through as much as possible of the "Messiah," the whole of which oratorio he knew by heart—during the journey; and, more than once, was beginning the "Amen Chorus," as he re-entered his grounds, and finishing it as he went up the uncarpeted staircase to his wife's sitting-room, in the blessed assurance that he should find her as happy and in as pleasant a mood as himself.

In spite of all this singing, as he was preparing to start with the trap, to meet his daughter, he would, in those happier days, after a couple of hours' comparative silence, enchant his wife by a really fine and lover-like rendering of "Would you gain the tender creature?" "Ah! How I likit that song; good song! You sing it so well, my dear!" Mrs. Penrose, who considered herself as "the tender creature," had always added when it was finished. And then her husband had probably only been deterred, by his sense of what was due to his profession from giving the whole of "Acis and Galatea," between Kelvingham and the station.

There was no singing for the rector now; there had not been for the last fortnight. There had been a deathbed in the parish to which he had not dared to go; there had been a funeral in the churchyard at which his services were not required. All songs had ceased for him. It seemed that not even Mariora's presence

could awaken them again. Indeed he dreaded meeting his daughter, in spite of his longing to see her. He left home early, and drove sadly through the country lanes, going some distance out of the way, to avoid the village street, which had grown intolerable to him. He looked old, grey, and as if his pride, if not his heart, was broken. The sight of a parishioner was hateful to him. He thought every one he passed regarded him either with pity or contempt; and he hated the pity as much as the scorn. He would have gone miles out of his way to have avoided the brother clergyman he met. Yet, in spite of his depression, when he really saw Mariora running along the platform to him with outstretched arms, and her face bright with delight, he could not help looking suddenly bright, too, as he folded her in his arms and kissed her many times.

Mariora was brought home in triumph; the parish news, except one grave item, poured into her willing ears; her own

account of the meetings in Birrendale listened to with more of love and wonder than ever before, and less of that half-cynical, half-pitying incredulity that before had so often grieved her. All the next day she was out and about the parish, anxiously looking up all her poor people, and her "young converts," for she clung fondly to the phraseology of her curate (for she was engaged to a curate who was almost as wonderful as herself) and her colonel. Her ways were not her father's ways; but how he adored her! She was the very incarnation of all that ever had been best in him. Her beauty did not fade at once, at her mother's had done; it had an English permanence in it; it was the romance of her father's life heightened, refined, made visible, as her religious enthusiasm was his own flitting impulses of zeal made stable. But when the excitement of welcome had died out, Mariora began to feel that there was something unusually oppressive in the domestic atmosphere;

and her parents also noticed with anxiety that she evidently shunned all mention of her brother's engagement. Mariora was thought to be not looking very well.

"It strikes me you are not looking quite your brightest," said her father, when they were alone and the first flush of pleasure had died away. "Too much excitement, too continuous a strain, my dear child! Nothing is more wearing than the exercise of moral and spiritual force. I'm afraid you've been overdoing it lately. You look as if you wanted rest—a good long rest."

"Perhaps I am feeling the reaction a little, father," said Mariora gently. "I have been very happy in my work. Perhaps, just now, I may have run down a little; perhaps"—hesitating, and lowering her tone—"perhaps there is a burden on my mind I cannot altogether lay upon the Burden-bearer, as—as—I should."

They were standing, side by side, near the window. The father had thrown his arm round his daughter's little form.

With her last words, Mariora crept nearer to him, and hid her face against his shoulder.

"I know, I know, darling," he said, much moved, as he bent fondly over her, and kissed the close clusters of her dark hair. "It is a grief we must carry to our graves; but look up, dear, Basil will have a bright future yet."

"And will that be justice?" asked Mariora in a very low tone.

"Ah, child, this is a very mixed world; a strangely mixed world!" said her father. Then he added, "We must make the best of it."

Here they were interrupted, and Mariora put on her hat and went out. She strolled sadly into the churchyard. A mason was putting up a new tombstone. She paused an instant, read the name.

"Dead!" she said, as she turned slowly away. "Ah! he never looked up after his daughter left her home. He said it was his death-blow. Did my father bury

him? Surely not; he could never have taken *that* funeral. Poor father, oh, poor father! He could not tell me. No wonder he looks so ill and worn!"

Mariora left the churchyard, and went over the fields to a small farm at a remote corner of the wide parish. A quaint little figure she looked as she walked along the much-trodden path, between the long stretches of bare fields, with her spare form, and her exquisite face under the soft mass of overshadowing hair—the face, just then, so profoundly sad and intent, so different from her brother's, and yet so akin to his. Presently she raised her eyes and looked along the level path before her, as if gazing on some ineffable tragedy.

"Oh," she said, "with what joy I used to come along this path to that little house, to see my first convert! *She* was my first convert. I cannot believe that all is lost. She was sincere—I'm sure she was—and good and earnest as could be, until he came and bewitched her. How

am I to meet the girl he is to marry? How can I? Yet next week, I suppose I must."

She went on very slowly, praying as she went that she might be guided to do exactly what was right. She was willing to give up all her own ideas and feelings, if only she might know the next right step, and be able to take it. But to have to meet Alison—to have to meet, perhaps, Alison and Basil together—seemed to her dreadful. Yet she had arranged to take part in Colonel Maxwell's services. She would be in town, near the Tower. If she shunned Alison, she would be betraying Basil; cutting him off, perhaps, for ever, from all that was good and holy; if she greeted Alison as, under happier circumstances, she would have been only too glad to do, she would be acting against her own conviction.

In due time she reached the little farmhouse, and knocked at the door. A widow answered the knock; a widow bowed more with sorrow than the weight of years. In

an instant she recognized her visitor, and her form grew suddenly tall.

"You! you!" she exclaimed wildly. "Give me back my child! Give me back my husband! You can't! Then——"

Mariora had always known her as a decent, fair-spoken woman; then that widow launched such a volley of oaths and curses at her as she had seldom heard before, as she bid Mariora get out of her sight.

"I only came to mourn with you! You know how I loved her!" said Mariora fervently.

The widow shut the door in her face. Mariora felt as though her heart must break.

But another blow was still in store for her. There was a little hamlet and a low beer-shop near the farm, that Mariora had to pass on her road home, as she had already passed it on her way to the widow's. There had been a young fellow drinking at the bar. He had seen her pass, and now came

out to meet her. It was midday, but he was even then hardly sober.

"Hi! you, miss!" he called thickly, when he saw her; "you, miss! I want my girl! My girl I was going to marry! Do ye hear, miss? I want my girl! You go and tell your brother I want my girl he stole away!"

Horror-stricken as Mariora was, she was absolutely without personal fear. She stopped, and said earnestly, calling the man by his name—

"Oh, has it come to this? Do give it up! oh, pray, give it up!"

"Bah!" said he, stooping, and making a hideous grimace in her face. Then he turned away, and blundered back to the beer-shop. Mariora turned into a little copse, and there knelt, and raised to God a face full of anguish, such as is rarely seen by other eyes than His.

Mariora was a long while reaching home. The new tombstone was in its place when she again passed it, and the mason was

gone. Not far from it was another grave, the family grave of the Reverend Basil Penrose, on which was a cross of dark granite, sacred to the memory of John, the beloved infant son of the rector, who had died a year before Mariora was born. Underneath the baby's name was inscribed, in Greek characters, the Easter greeting of the Greek Church. To that grave, every Easter morning, when it was freshly decked with flowers, the rector and his wife used to go, and in his wife's native dialect the English rector would say, "The Lord is risen indeed!" And she would answer fervently, "And hath appeared unto Peter." And they would speak of their child who, to them, never grew any older—their little one in heaven.

Across that inscription and across that baby's name, when Mariora returned, there had fallen a heavy shadow, so heavy that the words were all covered up by it; and the sunshine fell on a blank space under the Greek words—a blank space waiting for

other names. How often, when Mariora and Basil were children, had they hushed their play before that grave, and stood together there, wondering about the little brother Mariora had not seen; talking about the mysteries of the heaven he lived in, scanning the strange letters under the baby's name! As she stood there alone, Mariora could almost see again the two little things, herself and Basil, standing there before that granite cross—two dark-haired, foreign-looking children, under the shadow of that English church. She had felt too much, and felt it for too long a time, to weep for her loss any more. They were parted for ever. Their old life together had long been past; but in spite of all, now that the storm of sorrow and indignation had spent itself, she longed with an unspeakable longing for Basil once more. There was an empty place in her heart that no one else could fill. Who else had ever been the sharer of her childhood?

The summer before Basil had met Alison,

an idle fit had come upon him. He had taken a holiday. He had been working desperately hard for a long time, he wanted to play. He had played! His sister had that morning seen some of the consequences of his holiday. There would be another name on the granite cross before long; but even then the full tale would not be complete. Where is the end of any deed?

A new portrait of Alison Bayliss was sent down to Low Kelvingham the day before Mariora left for London.

"Your brother's good angel, dear," said Mr. Penrose, when he had carefully set it up on the little side-table in the sitting-room.

"How sweet! How good!" cried Mariora, bending over it; but she spoke very sadly.

"She has an influence over him we could hardly have hoped for," said Mr. Penrose. "She is a dear, sensible girl. You will be careful, Mariora."

"Yes, father."

"Ah! I know what Mariora think," exclaimed Mrs. Penrose. "I tellit you before what Mariora say. Mariora say what I say, 'And th' othair one?' I tellit you again what I tellit you before, if I th' othair one I killit your naice gairl, that's what I do!"

CHAPTER X.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

In the whole of the City of London there was not a happier creature than Alison Bayliss, as, after Basil had left, she flew upstairs to dress for the meeting at which she was to hear Mariora sing. After the misery of the last two days, the rebound was simple ecstasy; everything was a delight. But more delightful than all was the hope that had just sprung up in her kind heart, of being able to make up the difference between the brother and sister. If only she could see them together again! What a sweet consummation for which to try!

"If I could only see Basil kiss his sister!" she thought. The scene was

before her mind's eye; she meant to realize it!

Alison was in a perfectly delightful mood during the short walk to Cannon Street, devoting herself to her mother and Uncle John as wholly as if no Basil Penrose existed, and making them both laugh with her quaint sayings and her sharp observations on all they passed. On that evening it seemed to her that the most commonplace sights and sounds were full of special interest; how much more, then, the half-demolished Tower Street, that recalled to her so vividly, she said, the picture of London during the rebuilding after the Great Fire! Truly it was a pleasant little quarter of an hour to them all, especially to Uncle John, who enjoyed nothing on earth so much as listening to his niece when she happened to be in that peculiar vein he loved so well. They came to the great station and its electric light, and went upstairs into the hall, where a large audience was thronging in.

"That's what I so much admire in you good City people," Basil once remarked to Alison. "You have acres of empty churches lying waste; but if you want to hold a religious meeting, you have to pay fifteen pounds for the hall of an hotel. You must indeed be the 'children of the light!' And I really should like to demonstrate to you how much more stupid than the men of this generation you prove yourselves to be in this particular instance."

Just inside the hall they met Alec Carruthers, who was showing people to chairs, and giving them books and papers. Several other men about the place were engaged in the same way. Alec seemed now as used to it as if he had been about it for years.

"You will like to be near the platform," he said, found them capital seats, and disappeared.

The people all around appeared to have come together for a very serious purpose. Even before the Colonel and his friends

entered, any one used to gauge the sensibilities of an audience would have been impressed by its earnestness of purpose. Alison, always quick to discern the spirit of those around her, felt the influence at once.

The platform began to fill with a small choir of both sexes. Among the ladies sat Mariora. Alison, with the keenest interest, recognized her at a glance. She was, as Alec had said, "very wonderful;" she was also far more like Basil than Alison had expected; she had the same concentration; she seemed quite unconscious of the gaze of a large audience—utterly unconscious of it. Alison thought she was praying inwardly, and hardly liked to watch the beautiful grave face too intently, feeling that it was a sort of intrusion. She turned away for a moment, but always to find herself compelled to seek Mariora again.

Then the service began. It was intensely real and earnest, quiet, orderly,

profoundly solemn, but instinct with a strong spiritual vitality; not only in the speakers, but in the majority of the congregation. This was no novelty to Alison; but seldom had her sympathies been more entirely awakened; she even forgot her eagerness to hear Mariora sing.

At last Mariora stood up, much as she had done in the Muirhead drawing-room, and sang; and Alison, although she physically sat still, mentally flung herself at Mariora's feet, with that outburst of adoration with which an enthusiastic girl salutes her ideal woman the first time she sees her. This, she thought afterwards, was probably the result Basil had anticipated, and from which he evidently shrank.

When all was over, and Alec, looking as pale as a ghost, came up to her, Alison, with flushed face and beaming eyes, said to him—

"You were right. She is more wonderful than I could have imagined!"

"Wasn't that Mrs. Maxwell sitting near

us? I should so much like to speak to her again. Do bring her here," said Mrs. Bayliss, adding, "and Miss Penrose too."

Alec disappeared, and a minute or two later, he and the two ladies were coming towards the widow and her daughter.

Alison stood up, prepared to greet Basil's sister with all her fluttering heart. She watched the little figure, so quiet in its simple dark dress, that yet was not at all prim—she watched it amid the rich and sombre colouring of the hall, she was almost afraid of it. Then they all met. Mrs. Bayliss was so much more than delighted to meet Mrs. Maxwell, that she nearly forgot Mariora; it was, after all, Alec who introduced Alison to Basil's sister, if, indeed, they needed any introduction.

"You have, I think," he said, with an effort which he himself knew was a desperate one, but which no one else noticed —"you have, I think, both heard of each other."

Mariora did not utter a syllable; she

kissed Alison in silence. There was no welcome in that kiss, although the trembling lips expressed deep emotion.

"It is because she and Basil are not friends," said Alison, by way of explanation, to herself. "I must make them friends again. I'll just bend all my energies to that."

"And you are going to hold a week's mission at Bow, in the far East?" asked Mrs. Bayliss, who was most anxious to strengthen her slight acquaintance with Mrs. Maxwell. "Miss Penrose is staying with you, I suppose? Won't it be a very long drive for you, every evening?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Maxwell, "and, unfortunately, my health is very bad, just now, and the night air tries me exceedingly."

"I want Mrs. Maxwell to let me stay at Bow altogether, during the Mission week," said Mariora. "I have been asked to stay there."

"I know you have, dear child," said Mrs. Maxwell; "but I've promised your father that you should not."

"Then what do you say about trusting Miss Penrose with us?" asked Mrs. Bayliss. "Your father"—turning to Mariora—"your father and I are great friends, you know. Let her come to us, Mrs. Maxwell. I am sorry to say we are living on Tower Hill, for my brother has such an eccentric love for the City, there is no moving him. Tower Hill will be much nearer Bow than Eaton Square is."

"Really, it is a suggestion worth thinking over," said Mrs. Maxwell, smiling. "Thank you so very much!—And you would go to the meetings with Mariora?"

"Most certainly; or my daughter and brother would take my place. You had better come," to Mariora.

"Don't you think, dear, it would save you fatigue? You have a heavy winter's work before you," urged Mrs. Maxwell.

"Oh, do come," urged Alison. "I should so much enjoy to have you with us. Do come!"

"Shall we talk it over with the Colonel?"

said Mariora, not closing with the offer at once, as Alison was eager she should do.

"Will you let us leave it then? And I hope so much we shall see you at the meetings," said Mrs. Maxwell. "Good-bye! good-bye! Thank you very much."

So Mrs. Maxwell went off, taking Mariora with her.

"One can hardly call that girl's manner gushing," remarked the widow to her daughter, as they left the hotel.

"I dislike gush," returned Alison quietly, and no more was said on the subject, although as the mother and daughter went home, Mariora was discussed in the minds of both with great amplitude.

"The parents made no secret of a quarrel between the brother and sister. Depend upon it, there's more in that girl's reserve, than meets the eye," said Mrs. Bayliss to herself. What would she have said had she known of the scene in the Tower Gardens after service last Sunday?

Alison was exceedingly tossed up and

down in her mind for a while. Presently, however, she felt sure, now she had seen and heard Mariora, that the difference was a religious one; the brother considered the sister a dangerous fanatic, the sister held the brother to be an infidel.

"I see it all! They cannot possibly think or feel alike; but should these differences be allowed to mar family affection? Can anything prevent a brother and sister being brother and sister?"

There is a tender mystery surrounding a relationship which we have never personally known. Alison had not had either a brother or a sister; consequently, the fraternal ideal had never very roughly come into contact with the reality; for even Uncle John and her own mother, although they sometimes had their little differences, had a fundamental affection and respect for each other; and they, of course, were no longer young. That a *young* brother and sister should have quarrelled and parted was inconceivable. No wonder

Mariora was very sad when the girl who was to be her brother's wife was introduced to her, not by that brother, but by a stranger. "It would have hurt me dreadfully," thought Alison. They were at such opposite poles, Mariora and Basil, and yet they seemed so alike. She knew, or thought she knew, what both of them felt and thought; her sympathies were with both. Poor dear Alison! she never could help seeing a little of both sides of a question. She saw herself laying a kind, compelling hand on each, and bringing them together again. It was a delightful idea! Once distinctly formulated it was astonishing with what rapidity all sorts of plans crystallized around it. Mariora's distant manner only urged Alison on.

Circumstances favoured her. Mrs. Maxwell, who had been suffering acutely while at the Cannon Street meeting, caught a bad chill during the drive home, and was unable to rise the next day. She sent for Mariora, and advised her to accept

Mrs. Bayliss's invitation. Mariora stood still for a moment, praying for guidance. The invitation had come without her seeking, it seemed as if she ought to accept it; she would only be a burden to Mrs. Maxwell if she did not. The first of the Bow meetings was to be that evening; the knowledge that she should be nearer her brother, even if she did not see him, had a strong fascination for her; and how intensely she longed for a kind word from him, no one but herself knew.

"I will go," said Mariora. "Perhaps if I stay with you—I don't like leaving you now you are ill—I might be a temptation to you to go out, you know."

"I had so set my heart upon going," said Mrs. Maxwell. "But, no doubt, it is all for the best. It is sure to be."

"It must be," said Mariora. "I'll send off a telegram at once."

It was a house in which telegrams were always flying about. How many came from the Colonel at the Tower in the

course of that day, I should not like to say.

"She can come, dear!" exclaimed Mrs. Bayliss, breaking in, telegram in hand, upon Alison, as she was scribbling away in Uncle John's den.

"Delightful! Let us send off an answer this minute! My charm is beginning to work already!" she added to herself. "They shall be friends before to-morrow evening! What a pity Basil is away with that 'Mr. Dives' of his to-day! But perhaps it is all the better. Things will arrange themselves without him. I must see Mariora smile; she smiled, but that was a smile of religious rapture, as she sang. I must see her quite gay—merry! I know by the look of her face she can be!"

As the short day was waning, as one of those marvellous "afterglows"—about which there were, just then, letters in every day's *Times*—was falling on the Tower of London, Mariora, who had been repeating, "Lead, kindly Light!" during the

whole of the drive, arrived at John Harbuckle's house. Alison ran right down to the hall door (an unprecedented action in that City house), and threw her arms round Mariora with a welcome that would have thawed an icicle. Mariora did not seem at all like an icicle, but a little figure all soft warm fur, and soft dark hair, and a face that bloomed like a flower, with the most friendly little English nose set among its foreign beauty.

"Do you know, you rather frightened me last night," said Alison, as she escorted her guest upstairs. "But now, I see you're just a girl!"

"A girl! Well, not such a very young one!" returned Mariora, with the most musical laugh in the world.

"And I'm sure I shall love you very much!" said Alison, with a quick flush.

"And I you!"

"I've never had a sister," said Alison.

"Nor I."

"Only Jessie, you know, and she is a cousin."

"Ah, I remember her! It was she who told me about you; she is a connection of that dear young fellow, Alec Carruthers, one of our best helpers, you know. He doesn't mind what you give him to do; he is so anxious to be useful. He is such a comfort to every one! May I see the Tower before it grows quite dark?"

So, knowing that Mrs. Bayliss was in the drawing-room, Alison took Mariora to the dining-room window.

"There is our Tower, all rosy in this wonderful light!" she said. "Have you never seen it before?"

"Never. Which is Basil's turret?"

"This nearest one. We are seeing it this evening literally *en couleur de rose*, aren't we?"

There was silence long enough for an echo to have repeated "literally *en couleur de rose*."

"And so that is Basil's turret?" said Mariora; and Alison felt that the girl beside her was very fond of that haunter of the Tower.

"Is one very fond of one's brother?" Alison asked.

"It is an affection which seems to have no beginning, as we do not remember when there was only one of us; and so it seems as if it ought never to have any end," said Mariora, in that singularly expressive voice of hers, that, like her brother's, was so entirely her own.

"I have heard—I know there has been a little difference between you two," said Alison. "But," rushing into sympathy, "that's nothing between relatives, is it? I'll make him make it up at once! you will see! He will be back to-morrow. May I do as I like? You will leave it in my hands, won't you?"

"You are a good child!" said Mariora, patting Alison's shoulder.

After this, Mariora grew as friendly as she was charming, and Alison thought she was more wonderful every minute.

They all went to Bow together that evening; they all seemed very happy,

Alison, intent upon being a peacemaker, felt the peacemaker's promised blessing hers already. So rich in happiness was she to her own consciousness, she indeed "inherited the earth" that evening.

There was a note from Basil next morning. He would be at the Tower by noon, and would come to see Alison about five. He could not come earlier, she might be sure, or he would.

What would he do when he found that his sister was with her?

"Well, he must yield to circumstances, like all the rest of us!" said Alison gaily; but she was not quite easy about it, in spite of the airy way in which she spoke to herself, for who could calculate on Basil? She began to spin a little plot for immediate execution.

Mariora was very busy all the morning. She had a gigantic correspondence, to which she devoted many hours every day, and much prayer and Bible study. She brought a packet of unanswered letters with her,

and more came by every post. She had correspondents all over the country. She worked away steadily at them all the morning, turning out a number of answers that fairly astonished Alison.

"You look quite wearied," Alison said. "I must take you out after lunch. We had better go to the Tower, as you have never been there; because you know, I consider that, as Basil would put it, there is a positive criminality involved in a subject of Queen Victoria's not knowing the Tower of London intimately! You should see how the Americans revel in it, and gloat over it, and envy us for it! They say 'it is such a sweet boon.' Of course, it takes years and years to learn the Tower thoroughly; indeed, nobody has come to an end of it yet; but I should intensely enjoy giving you your first lesson to-day."

"Don't you think I had better see Basil here first?" asked Mariora, hesitating.

"Dear me, no! Who's afraid? We are not going to run away from him as if we

had picked his pocket!" said Alison, far too much excited to remember that, sometimes, she had been afraid of Basil herself.

"Well, if you think he won't mind it."

"Mind it! The Tower belongs to the Queen, not to Basil!"

"Then, dear, my afternoon is at your disposal," said Mariora. "I only stipulate that I shall not be late at Bow."

"Trust me. I am rarely late. Miles too early, as a rule."

"Very well, we will go," said Mariora, still rather doubtfully; then she added, "Are there slums anywhere near here?"

"Slums!" cried Alison, with enthusiasm. "You shall see the district where my Mission works!"

"Ah, yes! I've heard of that! That dear young fellow, Alec Carruthers, sends flowers there from Muirhead. Mrs. Mac—Jessie—told me about it. And, do you know—but, of course, you do—that it was a little Report of your Mission that first stirred Alec Carruthers up to a desire to work among the poor?"

"I am so glad!" said Alison brightly. "We'll go and see my dear slums to-morrow, won't we?"

"Does one find people there sometimes?" asked Mariora under her voice. "People who have been lost to their friends, for instance?"

"Oh, often!" replied Alison. "That is—well, not so *very* often; sometimes. They hide themselves away so, you know."

The woman with the tawny hair, and the worn face and form, that once must have been so grand, flitted before her mind's eye. She was just about to tell Mariora of her, when Mrs. Bayliss came into the room and interrupted the conversation. Uncle John afterwards walked down to the Tower gates with them, and in the shabby waiting-room took their tickets for the Armouries and Jewel House, and saw them through the still shabbier refreshment-room, where beer and buns were being consumed by a few hungry visitors.

"And where," said Alison, "you see

there is a capital model of the Tower, which would give you a good idea of the place as a whole—only we can't stay among these eating people, and I know it all by heart."

They left the shabby room, John Harbuckle saw them to the first archway, and then returned home. By this time the woman with the tawny hair, the scene in the Church of the English Martyrs, which, when Mariora had spoken of finding people in the slums, had crossed her memory, had quite faded from Alison's mind. She felt that she was going nearer to Basil at every step, that his sister was with her, that she hoped to see them folded in each other's arms. And as well as all this (for she was John Harbuckle's niece, and the granddaughter of his parents, with far more of the Harbuckle than of the Bayliss in her), she felt that she was a Londoner, and was going to show a girl who had never before seen it, her own dear Tower; and this always

gave her a most delightful thrill. Altogether, her mind was so full of thoughts and emotions, that Mariora's question about finding lost people in the slums was quite crowded out. Some echo of it, however, still lingered in Mariora's heart, and straightened the sweet curves of her beautiful lips, as, following Alison, presently she raised her eyes to Jane Grey's dormer window, above the Prisoners' Walk, as they stopped for a moment at the corner by the Bell Tower.

It was at that very moment, when the two, Basil's sister and his betrothed, stood together in the narrow street, by the corner of the dark Bell Tower—the street between the casemates of the Ballium and the tall wall, on the top of which is the Prisoners' Walk—that a young woman, poorly clad, but with rich hair, still showing under her cheap black bonnet, left a house in Wellclose Square, not very far to the east of the Tower. It was a house that had been built about the same time

as John Harbuckle's, and very much like it—a fine old house, once the residence, doubtless, of a wealthy merchant or ship-owner, now let out in rooms. There was a laundry on the first floor. Through the long, narrow windows, one could see rows and rows of collars hanging on lines. In that room the young woman had been ironing since the early morning, ironing with a fierce quickness that was terrible to see. Faster and faster she worked, never pausing for the dinner-hour, until at last, although there was still a large heap of unfinished work beside her, she suddenly put down her iron and turned as if to leave.

"You're not going?" asked the fore-woman.

"I've done!" exclaimed the other, with a gleam of positive madness in her eyes; and she put on her bonnet and went—went westward, towards the Tower—with her features sternly set and her fists tightly clenched.

CHAPTER XI.

ALISON'S LITTLE PLOT.

MARIORA and Alison went along under the brown patched wall of the Queen's House.

"Do you see that window up there? said Alison, getting a little nearer to Mariora, her colour heightening as she spoke. "Through that window I heard Basil's music, before ever I saw him! It followed me. Oh, I remember it so well! I could hear it as far as the Traitors' Gate —that arch—we shall come to it directly. And there was a poor woman, with her ragged children, looking at these steps. She had one of those pink Penny Guides in her hand; and she said, very solemnly, pointing to the Water Gate under the arch, 'And that's where they brought the

prisoners in; and they never went out no more!' The children were evidently deeply impressed, for I heard one of them ask, 'What, never no more, mother?' And she answered, very gravely, 'Never no more!'"

"How awful!" said Mariora, with a shudder.

"Yes," said Alison. "Yes; it struck me at the time, and I have never forgotten it," and she went on with her own original "guide-book" quite easily. She was delighted that Mariora was duly impressed with the Tower. Poor Alison!

"There are not many people here to-day," said Mariora presently.

"Ah! you should see it on a free day, on a Monday," said Alison gaily. "There were ten thousand people here last Whit Monday. And such people! True East-enders. The East is ever faithful to its Tower. I bring some of my school children here, now and then, for a treat," said Alison. "Once I brought a young

woman, who showed some signs of intelligence with me. When we came to this portcullis, and this Bloody Tower, I said, in my most didactic tones, 'Do you know these buildings are very, very old?' 'Yes, miss,' she said, under her voice, quite awe-stricken. '"Ow old?—sixty 'undred years?' I collapsed. The reign of Henry the Third was but as yesterday to that. They do take it out of one so!"

Mariora laughed. "You drop into the lingo quite naturally," she said, as they turned into the Jewel House, where they saw the Queen's crown, shining with a pure radiance, which suggested to Mariora an illustration, so likely to be used many times in her letters, that it pleased her very much indeed. Then they wandered about the Armouries, and St. John's Chapel, where Alison had met Alec Carruthers, last Sunday; and where Queen Elizabeth, of York, the wife of Henry the Seventh, lay in state, once upon a time.

"They turned this into a *chapelle*

ardente. I often think of her lying here," said Alison. "Basil has to come through here every time he goes up to his turret. I went up there once with Uncle John. You should have seen him standing in that narrow cell, with just one ray of bright light streaming down upon his dark hair!"

Mariora turned to her. "You are a sweet thing!" she said unsteadily. "God bless you! Had we not better be going on?"

Alison thought of her little plot, and laughed to herself at the pleasure she was going to give Mariora. They left the White Tower, and crossed the quiet Parade Ground.

"You should just come on a free day. It is when the free-day visitor beholds from these steps, overlooking the Parade, a section of the British army drilling—it is then, my dear, that its attention is completely enthralled!" said Alison. "The White Tower may be fine," she went on, "the block and axe, the instruments of torture I have just shown

you, may be blood-curdling, but it is the British soldier alone who has power absolutely to fascinate that part of the British public that visits the Tower on a Monday. In vain warders and policemen shout, 'Clear the steps! will you clear the steps? Move on! you must move on—move on, please! clear the steps!' They linger to the last second they dare, and then, quite lost to all besides the military they love, they descend to the Parade, and stand here rooted to the ground. That venerable State prison, the gloomy Beauchamp Tower, opposite, frowns resentfully; the site of the ancient scaffold maintains a dignified reserve; both know, and doubtless feel, how dead are their stony charms, beside the living British soldier. My father was a soldier, you know, so I understand it. Presently, when consciousness begins to reassert her sway, the Monday visitors, becoming dimly aware that they have not seen all the show, stroll off, and are, for a time, lost in that great State

prison—that's it, where you see the flight of steps that go down—but evidently they don't care much for it. They soon slink back to the Parade, and are again rooted to the ground, until the soldiers march away, or until the warders order the Monday visitors off; and then they go, reluctantly, and slow. Ah, there is my Princess, with her mother! They want to see you so much! They are crossing the Green towards us!"

Alison's plot, which had been rather vague, at once took concrete form. "How wonderfully everything happens just rightly to-day!" she thought, as they met and she introduced Mariora.

"I have been longing to see you, ever since Colonel Maxwell has been here!" said the Princess's mother kindly to Mariora. "He has said so much about you. Don't you get very tired of singing? It must be so trying to be so constantly before the public—every night, sometimes, I hear."

"It is very delightful work," said

Mariora, walking beside the Princess's mother towards the Queen's House. "I love it very much. Of course, one cannot always feel quite up to it."

"And you really think it does good?"

"Happily," said Mariora, with that radiant smile that always seemed like inspiration—"happily, we do not have to *think* about it; we have too many proofs that it does do good, the highest good!"

"Shall you be singing to-night?"

"Yes, at Bow. Colonel Maxwell will give the address. Do come! I always ask every one to come."

"If I can possibly manage it I will; but you will let me hear you sing here, won't you? In case I should not be able to come. You will like to sing in the Queen's House, won't you?"

As these two were talking, the other two naturally fell behind.

"Princess," exclaimed Alison, when they were at a safe distance, and as she spoke she stopped and laid both her hands

on her friend's shoulders, "I'm plotting! I want you to help me."

"Yes. This is the place for plotting. What is it?"

"Why, Basil Penrose and his sister have had a silly quarrel."

"Is it possible so sweet a creature as she can quarrel?"

"Perhaps it is all on one side. He is angry with her about something. She is tender-hearted, and can't bear that she should be estranged from him."

"He doesn't look as if he knew how to forgive."

"Oh, but he can though! I want you to let me write a little note at your house, and—where is he likely to be, do you think, just now? Up in his turret, or in the Belfry, or at the Salt Tower?"

"We'll find him if he's anywhere within the precincts. Come into the Gunpowder Plot room, the proper room for plotting, and write your note there. We won't go into the drawing-room, because people

will be coming directly, and I see mother is taking Miss Penrose there to make her sing; but we shall be safe in the Powder Plot room."

So they divided into two parties. Alison and the Princess ran up to the top floor, and entered the large south room, looking over the river, still called the "Council Chamber," where Guy Fawkes and his fellow-conspirators were examined, but which was now the Princess's own library and sanctum. Although it was November, the setting sun was finding out every bit of gold or colour on the many books that were everywhere—in cases, on tables, scattered in most delightful and tempting orderly disorder among pleasant relics of continental trips. The old room, with its vaulted ceiling and its one wide window, showing the crowded Thames, looked bright, even brilliant, that winter day; and it resounded with the cooing of the many doves, that, in wicker cages, filled the whole of the deep settle. Into this bright

room, high up above the river Thames, there entered Alison and the Princess, both too intent on their plot to notice any of these things, or even the head of King James the First looking down upon them from above the paneled mantel-piece.

"I have not told Mariora what I'm going to do," said Alison mysteriously. "Have you pen and ink? I'll just scribble a note, and tell Basil to come here. May I?"

"By all means! Here is everything. Will this pen do?"

"Thanks, thanks!" said Alison, and going to the writing-stand, she put down rapidly and without a pause:—

"Gunpowder Plot Room,
"Queen's House.

"DEAREST BASIL,

"Mariora and I have met, and are fast friends. She is with me here. Come over at once, and give me the pleasure of seeing you kiss her. This is not a request, it is a command. I think it is the only command I have ever laid upon you. You

will remember how far you promised to carry obedience to

"Your loving

"ALISON."

Without any lingering, she folded and addressed the note.

"That will bring him," she said, as she gave it to the Princess; and in her voice there was a ring of that fondness and pride in the possession of authority over the Basil Penrose who had never yet been known to yield to any other rule but hers.

A minute later, the note was out of the house, and beyond recall, the Princess on her way to the drawing-room in quest of Mariora, who was singing there. A thrill of fear passed through Alison as soon as she found herself alone.

"What if he does not come?" she asked herself, gazing with mingled terror and delight across the cooing doves out on to the river. "If he should not come; what then? But he will come! He will come; I know he will; he will come!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE LOOK OUT.

Alison, waiting with beating heart in the Gunpowder Plot room of the Queen's House, heard, as the Princess opened the drawing-room, Mariora's song filling the old "Lieutenant's Lodgings" with melody. She was singing Franke's exquisite "Sie nur still." Alison recognized it, and she tried to quiet herself with it, repeating several times, "Sie nur still! Sie nur still!"

"He won't come, dear," said Mariora, a few minutes afterwards, as she and the Princess returned. The lovely colour was paling on her cheeks, and there was a quiver, as of pain, around her mouth.

"But I say he will come!" exclaimed Alison with decision. "If he is in the Tower, he will come."

Alison spoke with a ring of absolute confidence in her voice, which, however, she hardly felt. Basil would come, "no doubt," which always sounds like "perhaps." In the meantime, waiting was hard, and the girls sought distraction.

"What a golden river!" said Mariora, moving to the window. "I had no idea there was anything so beautiful in London! And those hay-barges——"

"From the Medway," put in Alison.

"And those quaint flat boats, with the wooden wings folded beside them——"

"From Holland. The Dutch eel-boats."

"And what a number of dear, cooing doves!"

"Yes; and it's odd, isn't it, to hear them cooing in this room?" said the Princess. "Perhaps you don't know that this is where Guy Fawkes and his fellow-plotters were examined. There is a tradition that they were actually tortured—racked, you know, here, in this very room."

Mariora turned to the speaker and

opened her dark bright eyes widely with horror.

"That was the tradition formerly," continued the Princess. "Lord de Ros, who used to live here, and who wrote a charming little book of Memorials of the Tower, says, that the servants declared they heard dreadful groans coming out of this room, and were afraid of passing the door after dark; so now the rack is banished to the dungeons of the White Tower, the doves' cooing supplies the place of the groans, and *we* are the plotters!"

While this little narrative was going on, the girls had drawn around the fire, for the day, though bright, was cold; and there the black bust of James the First, set in the tall old super-mantel of painted wood, looked down upon the three fair conspirators, two of whom were waiting for the result of their plotting with barely disguised nervousness.

"Is that the King? I don't think much of that king; he has a mean, narrow face,"

said Mariora, looking up at the bust; thinking, however, little about our first Stuart and much of her brother; the bare idea of meeting Basil again making her tremble.

"Yes, that is James the Great, as the inscription on the alabaster slab behind my piano calls him," said the Princess. "You will be pleased to know that he was 'illustrious for piety, justice, foresight, learning,' and every other good quality, as well as being a literary genius, like you, Alison—'an author most subtle, most august, and most auspicious,' at any rate, in the opinion of William Waad, his Lieutenant of the Tower."

"Ah!" laughed Alison, her uncertainty and fear that Basil might not come, and her belief that he would, making her seem in buoyant spirits, "what a true epitome of English history are those touching lines of Pleaceman X! He went to the Royal Academy one day, you know, and there he saw a picture (I think it was by Mr.

Armitage, but I'm not sure)—a picture of Ahasuerus ordering Haman out for instant execution. He says he 'was sorrier for Amen than he ever thought that he should be,' and goes on—

> "'Kings was then tremenjus tyrints,
> Here they tried a sim'ler game;
> But we *fustly* cuts their heads off,
> *Then* reveres the martyr's name!'

Beautiful, beautiful words! How true they are! What—" springing up, and going to look over the piano—"what is the material of that panel with the laudatory inscription?"

"Alabaster, coloured. It's a sweet, rich tone, isn't it? especially in this light. Alison, shall we show Miss Penrose—or, may I call her Mariora?——"

"Oh, 'Mariora,' please!" put in Basil's sister.

"Would it interest you to see the room from which they say Lord Nithsdale escaped?"

"Yes, indeed," said Mariora; "because

his wife was so infinitely plucky! I think her keeping up a conversation all alone, after he was gone, is one of the bravest things on record, don't you?"

"Wonderful! But for all that, he wasn't good to her afterwards. It's the way of them, isn't it?" said the Princess.

"Is it?" asked Mariora, again opening widely her great dark eyes, so soft and lustrous, and turning her face towards the Princess with a wistful *naïveté*, in which there was a certain painful tremulousness, and yet a touch of something that showed she trusted her curate, the man she loved, with an infinite trust, that Alison saw and envied. Had Alison that perfect trust in the man of *her* choice? Was she not fearing that he might not come, even now, although, as she knew too well, she, in her note, had put it to him as a test of his love.

"It is the way with them. Isn't it? Don't you know?" asked the Princess, laughing.

"Don't *you* know?" returned Mariora,

the impertinent little upturned English nose, the most delicious thing of its kind ever seen, asserting itself in the midst of her Albanian bloom and beauty. This *Tu-quoque* was too much for the others; they all began to laugh, and Mariora joined them.

"It's only the next room; it's my bedroom," said the Princess. They went into the next room. "Sit in this corner of the window-settle. What do you think of that for a view? You look through my open door, and out of the corridor window you can see the site of the scaffold where they cut off the royal people's heads, and behind it St. Peter's, where they buried them; and then you turn and look out of this other window, and there is the Thames and the Tower Wharf, and the top of the Traitors' Gate; and far off, on clear days, we can even see the Crystal Palace. Pretty well for England, isn't it? One sees, perhaps, more beautiful places abroad."

"But not more interesting!" said Alison. "No place can be more interesting than

the Tower of London." ("How that brave woman's heart must have beat!" thought Alison, remembering Lady Nithsdale.) "One of your neighbours told me the finest, creepiest story, a few days ago," Alison went on, when they had returned to the Powder Plot room. ("It is time Basil was here! Oh, will he come? What if he doesn't?") "She told me that when they first came to live here, she put away a number of white things—her husband's white waistcoats, and books, and music—in an old cupboard near the Beauchamp Tower, past which, as she said, with great mystery, prisoners had to go, on their way to the scaffold. The white things were left in this cupboard for three or four months, and when they were taken out, every one of them was—" and Alison dropped her voice—"every one of them, she assured me, was *stained all over, as if with blood!*"

"How horrible!" said Mariora. "That's the most ghastly story I've yet heard, here!"

"It is quite true, they were stained," said the Princess. "I saw the stains myself; but, of course——"

Here should have followed the explanation, but the door was opened, and all eyes eagerly turned to it. The blood-stains were forgotten. There was Basil at the door. He had come, after all! Alison simply glowed with delight. He had come too, not suggesting an inquisitor, or a wizard, or any one imperious, or morose, or disagreeable, but in a perfectly charming good temper, with his eyes brighter than ever. He bowed quickly to the girls in general, and, crossing the room with a swift grace quite his own, held out both his hands to his sister, saying, in his most whimsical tones—

"Well, little chappie!"

Mariora had risen, and taken a step or two towards him. Hardly had he spoken the words of greeting, then her arms were about his neck, and his about her little form. He bent over the beautiful dark

head, with its mass of clustering curls—the head so like his own, yet so different—and kissed it many times, as it nestled against his shoulder.

The glad tears rushed to Alison's eyes, although they never fell. It was more beautiful than even her kindest thought had hoped, to see those two in each other's arms! "Dear Basil! Good Basil!" she said in her heart, over and over again. Never, oh, never before, had she loved him half so much; never before been half so proud of him and of her own influence over him! Never before (ah, poor child! let her be happy for this one brief moment), never before! For that moment or two no one spoke or moved, only there was the cooing of doves in the Powder Plot room, and the quick beating of Alison's heart. Then Mariora, trembling with emotion, went back to her chair; and Basil, a touch of colour on his usually pale face, turned to Alison for the thanks, the sweet recognition and reward of his obedience, that both

knew so well she alone could bestow. Eagerly his eyes sought hers, and, surely, if ever man found recompense for well-doing in woman's glance and approving smile, and beaming face, Basil Penrose found it then. They spoke only by glances, but it was enough for them; they both looked infinitely satisfied as Basil said (the words to others may have sounded incongruous, but to Alison they seemed as right and fitting as the quiet, undemonstrative kiss that went with them, and which was all Alison permitted in public)—

"Oh, but I say, Alison, our Mr. Dives *is* a brick! His education is very nearly completed."

"I'm so glad!" returned Alison, gaily.

"True bricks are scarce, very scarce!" said Basil, finding himself a chair, which he placed immediately opposite the "most high and mighty James," on whom he immediately concentrated his gaze. His eagle eyes at once detected a great crack in the slouched brim of the most dread

sovereign's tall crowned hat; for the bust was but a plaster one, although coloured like dark stone; and, being in very high relief, was much given to getting chipped —sometimes even in the nose, which was always a sad blow to its royal dignity. "Is it possible that I have been at the Tower since noon to-day, without having been asked to mend that crack?" exclaimed Basil, looking intently at the regal brim, as if to mend it were the only object in life worth living for.

"Be comforted, Mr. Penrose," laughed the Princess. "It only happened an hour ago."

"I do not take a turn of my lathe until that brim is mended!" said Basil; "because, although few things in history have caused me more genuine regret than the failure of the Gunpowder Plot, which was a good thing muffed, if ever there was one——"

"Mr. Penrose! This is the Queen's House!"

"Hear me out, Princess. Although I

can't sufficiently express the hatred and contempt I entertain for the mean-spirited individual who sent the fatal letter, yet I feel that the idea of this being the Queen's House in Her Majesty's Tower is not being carried as far as it will go, while that kingly brim is unmended. I repeat, I do not turn my lathe again until I have repaired His Sacred Majesty's sacred hat!"

Light words! light words! And lightly spoken! Who was to know how heavily weighted with prophetic doom they were fated too soon to appear!

But what a charming group Basil and the girls made there in that historic room, with the firelight and the golden sunset, the crowded river, the crimson settle, the cooing doves, the deep-toned alabaster! And they chatted, and they laughed, and even the Princess thought how strikingly picturesque Basil looked as he turned up his strange face to King James. But the golden sunset grew brighter, it attracted Basil's attention.

"Ah!" said he, turning to Alison. "I was just going to put that sunset to the question. I was just going to see what my spectroscope could make it reveal; because I'm not at all certain that the recent letters in the *Times* about these after-glows don't contain a deal of rot, and I was just about to go prodding at the subject myself, when Her Majesty, Alison the First, commanded my attendance here. What do you say, Princess? May we be allowed to go up to the Look-out on the top of the Bell Tower, and make a few observations?"

"Yes, do! And take us with you! I really think this promises to be the very finest of all these lovely sunsets. Don't you believe, then, in the earthquake and pumice-stone theory?"

They all rose, and accompanied the Princess through the long passages to the Bell Tower, and then, by a narrow flight of winding stairs, up to that quaint Look-out at the south-west angle of the Tower walls,

which looks, from the hill, like a great bird-cage hanging sheer against the sky. How gay their young voices, chattering and laughing, sounded in the old house, as Basil, with a curious mingling of gravity and fun, gave them an account of his own theory!

"Absolutely solid," he said, "as far as it goes. Only, at present, it doesn't go very far."

Then, suddenly, as it seemed, they left the dark, narrow stairs, and were in the cage, with a pure, bright golden sky all around them. What a marvel it was! A sight that, for Alison and Mariora, made their hearts stand still for awe and wonder. Nothing around but clear, pure, living gold —gold, with no taint of metallic earthliness or hardness at all about it, soft and living, the gold of the heavenly Jerusalem. A vast domed sky, most high and lifted up, without a speck of floating cloud, over-arched the great City, and the street of the City, the winding waterway, was of pure

gold—pure as the sky above it, but moving and shimmering; into the still air all earthly things rose with grave, purple dignity; in that atmosphere nothing was mean, nothing obtrusive; St. Paul's stood up in simple grandeur; so, too, did shafts of factories, houses, churches, bridges, and the mystery of ships' masts in the endless docks.

"The close of the Book of Revelation!" said Mariora, when she could find voice.

Her words, spoken as if they were literally true, hardly broke the silence that had fallen even upon Basil. Oh, golden heaven! Oh, golden river, golden ebb-tide now turning to the sea! what shall the next cold flood, as it rolls up under the dark, moonless sky, bear with it? There they stand, that young man, those girls, there they stand—living—together! The river, with its swift, strong current, runs down to the ocean; the swifter boats dart by, seeming almost at the Bell Tower's foot. There is the great bridge, London

Bridge; the Surrey side looks near, quite near. The four pinnacles of St. Saviour's, Southwark, are near, so very near. Those pinnacles impress themselves at once—but all unconsciously to her—on Alison's retina, as the point that most attracts the eye when gazing southward. How beautifully the slender spires stand out against the golden sky! The Princess points them out to Mariora, while Basil and Alison draw together apart.

"Our golden winter!" whispers Basil.

"Dear," returns Alison, with a subdued and gentle ecstasy, "we must have wandered to heaven together!"

She turns up her face to his, and the strange, pure light falls upon it, transfiguring it. She looks like a glorified spirit; so radiant, so happy. He bends down to her with infinite love and tenderness, returning softly—

"With you, love, heaven is everywhere for me! For me, heaven is where you are!"

She smiles fondly. For the time, she can say no more. Presently her glance falls on the City.

"Take me for a walk, dear! You never take me for a walk. I want to hear all about Mr. Dives," she says. "Take me for a walk in my dear City."

Basil hesitates. Alison is still looking towards the City; she does not see the change in Basil's face. But it is only for a second.

"What are we to do with Mariora?" he whispers.

"Oh, the Princess will take care of her. And we won't be long," returns Alison.

"Very well, then—if you are sure you wish it?" says Basil, still lingering.

"I do wish it, dear; very, very much indeed. I should love to go!"

"Then, you shall go! Princess, would you mind looking after my sister for an hour? Because, if you would be so good, Alison could take me out for a walk."

"I shall be only too delighted; but"—to

Alison—"won't you stop and have some tea first?"

"No, thanks," said Basil, answering for Alison. "This sunset won't stay, don't you see? And we want to make observations from different points of view."

"You won't make me late for the meeting, will you?" asks Mariora anxiously.

"Oh no! I'll be back in good time. Punctuality is one of my few virtues," laughs Alison. "You don't mind our leaving you, do you?"

"I shall be very well taken care of here, I'm sure!"

"Then *au revoir*, Princess!" cries Basil gaily. "Good-bye, little chappie, good-bye!"

Basil and Alison turn from the golden sky and the Look-out that has windows all round, and grope their way down the narrow stairs that, by contrast, are so dark. They pass the wooden lobby of the Prisoners' Walk, and the old door that leads to the Strong Room of the Bell

Tower, where Basil's lathe is at rest. They go quickly through the long corridors of the Queen's House, they run lightly down the broad staircase, on the walls of which the young Queen Victoria is still being married to the young Prince Albert. The heavy door is opened for them; it is shut behind them with a loud metallic clang. They start, her hand firmly pressed on his arm, for their walk through the City.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE AFTER-GLOW.

When they reached the outer gate of the Tower, Basil cast one rapid glance over the Hill. He saw there nothing to alarm him; so he placed Alison's arm still more firmly upon his own, and away he started with her, their faces westward, toward the City. No slow, lover-like loitering suited his mood that day. He seemed to long for swift movement, and in spite of the heavy traffic then crowding the Hill, he crossed into Tower Street at a pace Alison enjoyed, but could hardly maintain without effort. But the effort was a delight to her; this energy, this speed, and the keen exhilarating breeze fanning her face as she swiftly passed through it,

awoke every one of her faculties. Never had she felt before so thoroughly alive. And Basil, as they went along, talked incessantly.

"Before this time to-morrow," he said, "all must be settled. I dine with Mr. Dives this evening. He comes down to the Tower to-morrow. His education, as far as it concerns us, shall be finished before the sun sets again!" said Basil. "I have never failed with him yet," he went on. "But we've only had comparatively 'little goes' up till now. This is going to be a success beyond all my hopes! This is *our* success! *Ours*—not merely mine. I shall owe it to you, Alison! That's why I value it—I shall owe it to you! I wouldn't care a rap for it, if I couldn't see you in it! And then we'll be off to the Continent, where we'll get more appreciation than we shall ever extract from the English scientific Big Wigs. Then we'll have our golden winter in the South!"

Tower Street was half blocked up, gangs of men still hard at work in the road. The pavement was densely crowded, but the crowds were nothing to Basil; he seemed to find a pleasure in steering Alison through them, and never once relaxed his pace or his talk. And from every point of his talk he led up to adulation of her; as they say, there is a way to London from every town in the kingdom. And above them, moment by moment, the sky deepened. The pale gold warmed into the intense glow of the molten gold Alison had seen poured from the crucibles of the Royal Mint, and the molten gold into a solemn orange red. Right away from Tower Hill nearly to Cannon Street Station, the half of the roadway still open for traffic was filled with one solid block of vehicles, all standing in silence under the awful gravity of that deep after-glow. It was a wonderful sight; but that young man and woman, passing so rapidly among the even-paced men of business, were, for a while, far

too deeply engrossed in each other and in their future to notice it, or the strange silence that had fallen on the City. They were in Cannon Street, at the point where St. Paul's first becomes visible, when the long-sustained quiet at last compelled attention by its very continuance. They stopped as if each had been simultaneously impressed. For a moment or two they looked out into the world again, out of themselves; living in the present, not in the future.

"How quiet the City is; and how full!" said Alison, pausing to listen, as one does to a rest in music. "I do not know my City without the noise of its traffic," she added presently.

"It's extraordinary, very extraordinary!" said Basil. "I confess to a respect to-day for the London carman I never felt before. It is wonderful, when you come to think of it; here is a solid half-mile of vehicles, and every one of the drivers is sitting unswearingly in silence! How

submissively even the most savage submit to the inevitable! Because, I need hardly tell you, who know all about these things better than I do, that when there is a chance of getting on, a carman's favourite term for his neighbour who blocks the way is 'old Bloater-'ead,' garnished with adjectives not to be mentioned before ladies. To-day there isn't a chance, and they know it. It's fine! You Londoners, Alison, are, after all, a grand people; you'll make a Londoner of me, some day. And oh, I say! this stoicism is really touching, you know, when one reflects that the raw material of the Christmas puddings of an appreciable part of the kingdom is at this moment in those waggons! Now there's a stir. Let us go on. I like this walk very much. You shall bring me out here again, my darling. You shall make a Londoner of me. 'I likit it well,' as my mother would say, although scientific London can't appreciate me. Mr. Dives, of course, isn't English. Yes, 'I likit it well!'"

"So glad, dearest! It is nice of you to like what I like. Do look at St. Paul's from here! Isn't it grave and lovely, this evening? And the way this street dips and rises again, and the form of it all made out so clearly by the lamps, and that intense sky—that deep, deep orange-colour, and the dark purple of the dome against it—you do like it, don't you? I love it! And oh, Basil! See! there is just one gleam of pure gold left—just on the cross of St. Paul's. Ah, how sweet that is, isn't it, dear, that the light should linger latest on the cross?"

"Through the medium of your eyes—yes, darling, very sweet!"

"Still the highest point in London," she went on, as if to herself, with her gaze still on the cross; and then she ended with a little sigh.

They walked on, talking quietly. Streams of men were plodding homeward at their usual pace; the pale electric light from the station showed other streams from other

directions, all homeward bound, all leaving the City. Basil and Alison went along Cannon Street to the south side of St. Paul's, where, in the huge wholesale houses, lights gleamed from a thousand windows. By the time they reached St. Paul's, Basil was again entirely immersed in his own affairs, and Alison as engrossed in listening to him. Suddenly she gave a little start.

"What is it, darling?" he asked hurriedly, but without slackening his pace.

"Oh, nothing! I fancied I saw some one I recognized, that's all! Yes, dear, go on; you were saying——"

Basil glanced behind him. A great packing-case, which was being carried from a warehouse to a van, hid the person Alison had seen. Basil went on talking; Alison forgot all else. The momentary impression faded almost as rapidly as it came. They went round the cathedral, then turned eastwards, down Cheapside. These great thoroughfares and their crowds

had a charm for Basil on that day. They turned their backs to the blood-red west; every face that came towards them, looked as if painted by Titian. Basil remarked it; he spoke of it to Alison, just after they had passed Bow Church. She said she would go up to the National Gallery and see how true his eye for colour was, adding—

"Perhaps you'll come with me, Basil, and give me a lesson? I have so much to learn, and I do so like to be taught by you. When shall we go? Perhaps, to-morrow? No, you will be too busy. One day next week, perhaps?"

"Next week! You'll be too busy about your wedding dress then, I hope," said Basil, "that is, if you are going to sacrifice to the correct thing to the extent of a wedding dress."

There was no block in Cheapside; was it the noise of wheels that deadened the footfall behind them? But among those crowding thousands, how could the fall of one woman's step be heard? Yet just

past Bow Church, Alison turned her head for an instant. Did she *feel* the sound she could not hear? She turned, but only saw the crowd of passengers—the many, not the one. Opposite the Mansion House, they crossed the all-but-impassable road. They turned down Lombard Street. The great banking-houses were closed, the street was comparatively deserted, a cab or two was prowling for a fare.

They had come but a few yards along Lombard Street—they were both living altogether in that glorious golden winter of love and prosperity, of which all Basil's talk had been during the whole walk—when a woman pushed past Alison, brushing her shoulder as she went by. It was all over in a moment. There was a tall woman, with a grand and liberally made face and form, a yard or two in front of them. The last deep glow of the blood-red sky fell full upon her. Alison knew her at once; it was the woman she had seen tending the dead baby in the loathsome slum, the

woman she had watched sobbing out her heart in the Church of the English Martyrs, the woman who had startled her, not many minutes ago, on the south side of St. Paul's. The mournful droop had left her shoulders now, the look of torture had been driven from her face. She stood there, looking in the deep red after-glow unnaturally tall and straight, with madness gleaming in her eyes. Then she tossed up her arms and her clenched fists wildly into the air, with a fierce shriek of despair, as she recognized Alison: "It's you! It's you! I can't kill YOU!" and made as though she would have thrown herself between the two lovers. But before her arms could fall, Basil had quickly drawn Alison into the road. In another instant he had stopped a passing hansom and was driving off with Alison, heedless of the shriek that followed them. But Alison heard that shriek; it entered her brain, her heart, her life.

It was all so sudden. Before Alison

could frame a thought, she was sitting there in the cab, with Basil tightly grasping her wrists, and her heart beating as if it would kill her. Their faces turned searchingly each to the other.

"You must not faint," he said in his most imperious tone.

"I will not."

"My brave Alison!"

She drew a long, shivering breath. "Who—who is she? I have met her before."

"You have met her before!" exclaimed Basil, with an intensity of horror in his voice. "And you go out into the slums alone! Promise me—swear to me—you will not go out alone again! If one hair of your head were injured, it would kill me! I must have you always with me! I shall know no rest when you are out of my sight. We must be married at once. I must have the right to protect you!" He seemed perfectly wild with terror.

"But, who—" began Alison falteringly.

Basil felt her drawing back from him. "Who? Nothing! Nothing to either of us! Some mad creature, who ought to be in Bedlam! Do you hear? You are not to go out alone! You don't know the dangers of the London streets!" Basil was trembling; she could feel his hand quivering as he held her wrists, as she instinctively tried to get free from his grasp.

"Nothing has ever happened to me before," said Alison faintly. "Oh, Basil!"

He could feel her shrinking away from him. Oh, if she could only shrink away into nothing! was what she felt; but the action, slight as it was, maddened him.

"You don't know what you are to me," he said wildly. "You can't know! You don't understand that, for me, you are the only being in all this crowded world! You cannot fathom my love for you! Without you, life for me would be over! Do you believe it?" he demanded.

"Yes," she replied, still more faintly than before.

"God bless you, Alison!"

He must, indeed, have been moved beyond all self-control, when such a benediction sprang from his heart and lips. His voice broke and faltered with the words. The sacred name fell on Alison's ears with intense solemnity. They sat in silence until they reached the outer gate of the Tower, where they alighted. It was already closed.

"Who goes there?" challenged the sentry.

"A friend," returned Basil.

They passed on. Alison did not take Basil's arm, but walked quietly beside him. She had been terribly shaken. A dread and horror had fallen upon her. The heavy gateways seemed to frown upon her. When they were crossing the bridge over the Moat, Alison said, in a very low voice—

"Basil!"

"My darling!" he returned eagerly.

"Basil—I know that woman's story. Some man has driven her mad. Could

it—" her voice sank and sank, but it lost none of its clearness—"could that man be you?"

The suddenness of the blow allowed no time for thought. Basil parried it with a direct lie.

"I never saw her before in all my life!"

Alison drew a long sigh of relief. In that deep after-glow, how easy for that poor, distracted creature to be mistaken! But the after-glow was all gone now. When they reached the path that leads to the site of the ancient scaffold, a sickly green moon was looming above the turrets of the White Tower.

"I wonder who will look after her?" said Alison, as if to herself.

"The police," said Basil sharply. "Alison, why will you think of other people? Will you never understand that *I* demand all your thought, all your care, every fraction of your love? You gave it me yourself, and I claim it!"

"Oh, Basil! why have we been so

happy, while others are in such dire misery?"

"Why? Are we the rulers of the universe, that we can tell why?"

He knocked at the door of the Queen's House. It was opened. He and Alison waited in the hall for Mariora. The door of the room, past the windows of which Alison had noticed the steamboats darting, on the morning of her visit there with Jessie, stood wide open. It was lighted up. Something glittering in a corner caught Alison's eye. She moved a step towards it. It was the small bright axe mounted on a halberd staff, which, in other days, was part of the insignia of the Lieutenant of the Tower—the axe that always accompanied the State prisoners to Westminster and back. Alison gazed at it with a pale, severe face, and a searching look of pain in her eyes.

"The edge is turned towards us," she said to herself, and her very heart turned faint, as if she knew it was her sentence of death.

CHAPTER XIV.

HER OTHER SELF.

Basil walked back to John Harbuckle's house with Alison and Mariora in moody silence. He kissed them both at the door, and went off at once.

Mariora, afraid of being late for her meeting, ran upstairs quickly; but Alison could not follow her. She stood for a few moments, in the wide, dimly-lighted hall, quite still, gazing vacantly into space. An awful sense of misery oppressed her. Something—a hideous, undefined something—had come between her and Basil. Did she doubt his love for her? Never for one second! Never—then, nor in the days to come! She knew he loved her. She was too much dazed to *know* that even

then they were really parted; but she was beginning vaguely to feel that something had come between them, that never again would they be to each other what they had been. And Basil had gone away from her in one of his sullen moods. She went to the street door and opened it. She looked along the path by which they had just returned from the Tower. There was no Basil there, nor anywhere within sight. How should there be? And yet she had thought perhaps he might have lingered. She closed the door, came in shivering, and slowly went upstairs. She had been terribly shaken; the nervous depression that was now gathering round her brought with it a feeling of desolation such as she had never before dreamed of.

"Alison, how pale you look! Something has gone wrong. Basil is angry at my coming here," said Mariora very sadly.

"Oh no, no!" said Alison, as if groping about in blind misery. "It has nothing

to do with you, dear. My head—oh, my head aches so! I must lie down. I can't go down to dinner—and—I'm afraid I shan't be able to go to Bow with you. You—you won't think it unkind, will you?"

"Unkind! As if you could be unkind," said Mariora, still looking very grave. "Here, lie down; let me arrange you cosily, poor child! But, dear, I'm sure something has happened," she went on anxiously. "What is it?"

"I—I don't know," returned Alison miserably.

"I am the cause," said Mariora. "It was wrong of me to come."

"It wasn't; indeed, it wasn't!" said Alison, from her pillow.

"The Bow people have just sent me a note, begging me to stay there the night. It will be better, I'm sure, for me to do so."

Alison said "No, no;" but at last gave a weary assent.

When Mariora had left, and the house was as quiet as the grave, Alison felt that Mariora's absence was a relief. But why should it be? The question would come; Alison could not keep it back. And awful fears came with it. The scene in the Church of the English Martyrs, the shriek, the words that had entered her brain in Lombard Street, a subtle something now and then in Mariora's spoken words—not a local accent, but a something that suggested the same place—that had two or three times brought the provincialism of that other one to Alison's memory—all these things seemed to come together now, with a meaning unthought of before. Perhaps Mariora knew too much. It was strange Mariora had never yet greeted her as her future sister-in-law. That mad woman's wild "It's you! it's you! I can't kill you!" and her threats in the church, what did they mean? "Do they mean that I am to disbelieve Basil because of a stranger's ravings? Why, she may mis-

take any man for her false lover!" said Alison, as, in vain, she tried to force back the suspicions that crowded her own aching brain. "Basil has always told me the truth. I'll believe Basil against all the world. I will believe Basil!" But rest would not come, even with that profession of faith. In the depths of her heart she was every moment growing more and more afraid of herself—of an Alison, neither she nor any one else, except Basil, had yet seen; but of whose existence she was becoming terribly conscious.

"I am looking to see where you keep your severity. You are the most severe person I have ever met," Basil had once said, bending over her hand as if it were the Book of Fate. She had wondered then at his words, but now a very terrible Alison was rising before her mind—an Alison who was, she knew but too well, no myth, no phantom either of Basil's love or her own fear, but a very real and dreadful being, that

was as truly her own inexorable self as was that gentle Alison now cowering in dread, now hopelessly imploring mercy that would never be granted by that inexorable self.

* * * * *

Basil, when he left Alison at John Harbuckle's house, went straight back to Lombard Street. A policeman on the beat had seen what had happened, had followed the woman to the end of his beat, and had spoken about her to the man on the next. They traced her for some distance, but always nearer the river. In Thames Street they lost her. Basil spent an hour hunting about the wharves.

"Could I see my enemy dead before me! Could I only look upon her dead face! Could I only be certain she had drowned herself!"

Perhaps he did not say, even to himself, those very words, but the wish was strong in him. He did not find her; so he

went up to the West End, to meet "Mr. Dives."

* * * * *

That evening Mr. Dives completed his education, as far as Basil Penrose was concerned.

"If only I could see my enemy dead!" said Basil, as, long after midnight, he walked under the great wall of the Queen's House towards his lodging in the Salt Tower.

CHAPTER XV.

ACROSS THE WATER.

Mrs. Bayliss and John Harbuckle were both at the breakfast-table before Alison, on the morning after she and Basil had gone for that walk through the silent City.

"They have quarrelled about Mariora, of course," said Mrs. Bayliss significantly. "Mark my words, John, there's a reason for that estrangement between the brother and the sister, as there is a reason for everything else."

"Possibly," returned John Harbuckle. "But I think there can be little doubt of the young man's love for Alison, nor of the power for good she has over him. He is likely, moreover, to score a brilliant success with his invention. He has very

greatly improved lately. You will be proud of him yet, my dear."

"He's a selfish wretch!" exclaimed Mrs. Bayliss vehemently. "He's a man to wring the very life-blood out of a woman's heart. I can't bear to see such a dove-like creature as my Alison made wretched by him! I never had so strong an antipathy to any man before!"

"I know you hate him, Mary. It is a pity, as I think, because it lessens your influence over Alison."

"He has tried to put himself between me and my child. I admit there is a certain diabolical fascination about him; but what it is I don't know, although I've felt it myself. My belief is that he will kill Alison, John!" said Mrs. Bayliss with heartfelt solemnity and intense bitterness.

John Harbuckle looked grave. "Your fears exaggerate the danger, if danger there is, my dear, I think," he was saying, when the door was gently opened, and Alison came in very quietly, looking quite pale and

haggard. With a consideration not often to be found in the domestic circle, neither her mother nor her uncle worried her with fond but trying questions.

"Alison," began Uncle John, as his niece took her usual place at table, "my friend Woolcomb met me yesterday, and told me he was anxiously waiting for that paper on Marie Overie you promised him some months ago."

"Ah, it isn't written yet," said Alison, with the ghost of a smile.

"Then write it! Write it to-day, my dear."

"That is not so easy, Uncle John," said Alison. "The subject wants a great deal of looking up. I haven't been to St. Saviour's, Southwark, for ages."

"Then go to-day," said Uncle John.

Dear, good Uncle John; it was quite as much on Alison's account as for the sake of his old friend that he planned the visit to St. Saviour's.

"To-day!" echoed Alison, turning to

the window. "To-day does not look promising."

"There are cabs still existing, you know, my dear," said Uncle John.

Again Alison looked at the window. The world looked very damp and grey out of doors. She was disinclined to go out. Archæology had for the time lost all its charms for her.

"I am sure Mr. Woolcomb must know St. Saviour's by heart, uncle" said Alison.

"Very probably," asserted John Harbuckle. "But he has, as you are well aware, but little descriptive power, and he wants your paper for a provincial friend."

"He can hardly have less descriptive power than I have to-day. My head still aches," said Alison.

"Well, dear, don't go if it is disagreeable to you," said John Harbuckle blandly. "But the walk might do you good, and,—" he hesitated before he pronounced the words that were to decide all—"if you

can manage it to-day, Alison, I shall take it as a personal favour."

He had risen with the last sentence, and had gently placed his hand on Alison's shoulder.

Alison quickly turned up her face to him, and said brightly, "Then, of course, I shall go! I am going as soon as possible, come hail, rain, blow, or snow! Come what will, the chance of conferring a personal favour upon you mustn't be lost, must it, Uncle John?"

With which John Harbuckle laughed, gave her a kiss, and went off.

When he was gone, Alison felt thankful that she was obliged to go out. She could not expect to see Basil before five o'clock. He might not be able to come even then, for she knew Mr. Dives had arranged to come down to the Tower that day, and how long Basil might be detained by him who could tell?

"In the meantime, how am I to live?" she asked herself. She could hardly imagine

herself alive at five o'clock. There was such a pain about her heart, she felt as if she must drop down dead long before then. It was well she had to go out. She caught her mother looking anxiously at her. It was more than she could bear. She hurriedly took up the couple of unimportant letters that she had found waiting for her, and which required immediate attention, and turned to the desk to answer them. It seemed a dreadful task, but it was soon over. She dressed quickly, took her note-book and went out, along Tower Street, across London Bridge.

Everything looked grey, bleak, cheerless. "Oh, our golden winter!" she said, shivering and drawing her furs closer to her, "our golden winter! Did it all fade away yesterday?" How changed everything looked! On London Bridge she realized the difference with a keenness more piercing than the chill wind. Yesterday—not yet twenty hours ago—she and Basil had left the Tower together, under

a pure golden dome. Yesterday, the river, the "street of the City," had been a pathway of shimmering gold. Yesterday, she had been young—oh, how young! how happy! Now, as she crossed the bridge alone, there was a leaden sky above her, a leaden river beneath, and she herself a careworn woman, with a gnawing terror in her heart. But she must needs turn her head to the Tower, and to Basil's turret, dimly seen through the grey mists and the unshed tears that filled her eyes. How much he loved her! Why should she be so unhappy, so depressed? She tried to smile, but she could not. Why not believe him? But London Bridge, on such a day, is depressing enough. There is a monotony of shabbiness about the passengers now. "My lady in satin, and the beggar in rags," seldom come into bold and picturesque contrast there now; and under a leaden sky, when a cutting east wind is blowing off the river, and a drizzling rain makes the greasy footpaths

definitely muddy, shabbiness looks shabbier than usual. One needs much inward happiness to be able to cross London Bridge on such a day without feeling sad.

Alison crossed the bridge to the muddy granite steps by which one descends to the level of St. Saviour's. She paused there for a moment, suddenly, and for the first time since she had left home, remembering her errand. "How lovely it is!" she said to herself, looking down at the old brown flint of the Lady Chapel, and then raising them to the beautiful choir, and the great pinnacled tower above it. "How beautifully it all comes together!" She went down the muddy steps, beside the hideous railway span, with its walls all vulgarized with flaunting pictures of theatrical scenes. The door of the choir, which is usually closed, stood open. She crossed beside the Borough Market; she opened the west gate of the churchyard; she returned under the shadow of the great church and the

massive buttresses of the choir, she went up to the half-opened door. A young man was guarding it.

"Have you come to see the body?" he asked gravely.

A police official passed Alison, and went in before she could find voice to stammer—

"The—the—the *what?*"

"The body," repeated the young man. "The body that was found drowned this morning, early, in St. Mary Overy's Dock, just behind the church."

CHAPTER XVI.

HE HAS HIS WISH.

"WILL you see it?" repeated the door-keeper.

Another police official passed in and walked quickly up the dim aisle of the ancient choir, towards the flight of steps that ascend to the new church. When he reached the transept he turned, and Alison saw him no more. She knew he had gone to view the body.

"It was the Lady Chapel I came to see," she managed to say. "Thanks, I know the way."

She turned eastward, and went slowly through the solemn building, oppressed with horror, but not with terror; she had no fear either of death or the dead. At

the end of the aisle she came to a heavy curtain. She drew it aside, and entered the low-roofed chapel. The curtain fell behind her, shutting her in alone. She sat down near the great painted tomb and effigy of Bishop Andrewes, with her eyes closed, and her hands clasping each other. "The body found drowned, this morning." The words went on, over and over again. The drowned body—and it was there, in the vault at the other end of the church; those men had been to see it! Found drowned; the sad drift the river casts up here and there, day after day; one more found drowned, washed up into the little creek behind the church—one more found drowned. A woman? of course, a woman; it is always a woman. Could it be *that woman?* Alison felt as if ice-bound. The chapel was cold, but it was not the cold that made her teeth chatter. She sat as if frozen to her chair, by the bishop's tomb, under the marvellous intersections of the Gothic roof. The Protestant martyrs, who

had been arraigned in that very chapel, stood up in their memorial windows, Bible in hand, and looked at her; she never saw them. The never-ending stream of life on the gradient of London Bridge went on, and on, and on, but she neither felt its movement nor heard its sound. The great trains thundered close by her, shaking the chapel as they passed, but she never noticed them. Among the mediæval bosses saved from the demolished nave, and piled up near her, there was a hideous, grotesque face, with red cheeks, leering eyes, and a vile, lolling tongue. It was at her very elbow, but she never saw it. The saintly bishop on his tomb was hardly more still than she, except for that shiver now and then, and the teeth that would not cease chattering. But as she sat there, the feeling came upon her that she must go and see that dead face. It grew stronger and stronger; yet she never stirred, nor tried to move.

The officials came out of the vault. Alison caught the sound of their steps as they passed

over the time-worn stones of the choir, and echoed among its lofty columns. Then there were other steps coming and going, all with the quick, sharp ring of officialism in them, all belonging to men with note-books. Then there was silence, profound and awful, in the vast church. Still the craving to see that face grew and grew in Alison's heart; still she never stirred from the holy bishop's tomb.

Suddenly Alison opened her eyes, opened them widely. They had a strained look as, of intent listening. There was a voice speaking to the door-keeper. She sprang up. She stood still, listening, with one hand pressed tightly over her heart, as if to still the beating that seemed to be killing her. She went to the thick curtain and cautiously drew it very slightly apart. Then, for an instant, her eyes closed, her figure drooped faintly. She roused herself. She knew that she was looking at Basil, that it was Basil who was walking so quickly along the aisle towards the vault.

In a moment or two he had reached the transept, and was hidden by the columns. She passed the curtain, she hurried along the dim aisle; she, too, reached the transept and the great dark doors between the two flights of steps that lead to the new church. The great door stood open. She paused at the opening, and looked in. Basil was there. There was no light except from the door, but there was light enough to see him and—the Other One—the Other One —still—pale—dead.

Basil raised his eyes from the dead face. He saw Alison. She looked at him steadily. She stepped into the vault, went up to the grand white face, majestic in death, framed by the dripping tawny hair. Basil was on the opposite side. Alison looked at him firmly.

"It was you! You drove her to it!" she said, without a tremour.

There was a moment's awful pause as they, these two lovers, stood face to face, with the drowned woman between them.

"From your point of view, yes!"

He spoke under his voice, but distinctly and without faltering.

Alison never moved her eyes from his during that awful pause, during those words. When he had spoken, the light faded from her eyes, they grew dreary as the eyes of the dead, she slightly raised her right hand with a movement of horror. One word, like the last sigh when soul and body part, reached Basil's ear.

"Go!"

They stood still, not a muscle moving, not a sound betraying the deadly agony of the wrench that parted them. They stood so still, he and she, with the drowned woman between them, they looked as dead as she. In the silence of that vault it was to Alison as if centuries went by.

At length Basil's lips moved; he spoke; his voice, that voice of his, so much its owner's own, sounded as if from the grave.

"I will obey you. I will go; but, if I go, it will be for ever."

With a shudder she turned her gaze from him; it settled on the dead woman's face. Had she spoken her last word to him? He paused, as if waiting for her to speak again, but her gaze settled so intently on that dead face, it seemed as if she neither saw him nor heard him more—as if she herself were dead.

"Alison," he said; then, with an intensity of passionate despair, he repeated the name, "Alison! Oh, Alison!"

It was his only cry for mercy, his only appeal to her love. She gave it no response; it was as if the words had never reached her.

"Understand," he went on, his imperious tone coming back to him—"understand clearly that no man ever loved a woman more purely, more wholly, than I have loved you! I repeat, you are the only woman I ever loved."

Alison had been standing like a marble image of sorrow, gazing down on the dead face that was scarcely paler than her

own; with Basil's last words she changed. She turned upon him, her eyes blazing, her cheeks burning—

"How could you dare to love me? How could you dare?" she cried.

"Dare?" he echoed, "dare?"

"Ay, 'dare'!" she threw back at him. "How could you dare to insult me with your love, when you were murdering my sister-woman? Go!"

"Not till I make you understand that she was never your rival!" said Basil. "I repeat, I have loved and respected you, and you only, of all women on earth. You have had no rival—never for one moment!"

"Rival! Good God in heaven! Rival!" She stopped, half-choked, before she went on. "Oh, if you had killed *me*, if it had been only *me* you were torturing and murdering, I would have forgiven you, and —and loved you, with the last throb of my heart; but you have murdered this sister of mine, you have tortured her to death. All is over. Go!"

She turned away from him. The fire that had blazed in her eyes and cheeks died down as suddenly as it had leaped to life. Once more her gaze settled steadily on the drowned woman's face—so steadily, that she never saw Basil leave her. He went away; he left the vault. She never turned. He paused an instant by the door, he flung his arms out to her with one last gesture of love and anguish, but she never turned; he saw her, he saw *only* her; he saw her standing up, tall, straight, severe, with her arms hanging beside her, standing so still, so dead, she might have been a sculptured thing of stone. His lips moved, but no cry escaped them. Would she have heard it? Would she have turned had she heard it? Then he saw her, as he peered into the gloom, he saw her lift up one of those arms of hers that had fallen beside her with such pathetic straightness, he saw her stoop and raise one of the dead woman's hands, raise it to her lips—saw her kiss it. He turned quickly, from that

sight, knowing that her love for him was shattered hopelessly, beyond all power of his to mend, and he fled away from her presence. He had had his wish. He had seen his enemy dead before him!

His quick steps on the worn stone floor of the church reached Alison's ear and penetrated her brain. She heard them growing fainter and fainter in the distance, until the sound of them ceased. Still she stood there beside the dead woman, and the one bitter cry in her heart was—

"Would to God I had died for thee, my sister! oh, my sister!"

CHAPTER XVII.

PARTED: ALISON.

As with the saddest, tenderest reverence, Alison gently crossed the ice-cold hand over its fellow, she felt that her own strength was rapidly ebbing away, and that she was alone and far from home. "I must get home!" she said, but her limbs were already failing her; for a moment she felt as if she must sink to the ground. Then the imperative need of effort aroused her. She left the vault with tottering steps, as if walking for the first time after a severe illness. The great church loomed above and beyond her, tall, vast, and gloomy, as she stepped from the vault into the transept. How long the aisles seemed! How far off, how impossible to reach, the

choir door! But she did reach it at last, and when she left the church, the wind blew the cold rain into her ashen-grey face, and revived her a little, so that she was able to walk to the outer gate and find a cab. She did not faint as she drove over the bridge; she never quite lost consciousness. When she reached home, all she could say to her terrified mother was—

"Don't ask! Don't ask! All is over!" There was no need to ask; it was but too evident that "all was over." Her physical strength, never very much, failed entirely. She lay on her bed simply crushed, but conscious, vividly conscious, in every nerve of her body, in every thought of her brain.

Mrs. Bayliss, a most admirable nurse in ordinary illness, was terribly alarmed at her daughter's collapse. The doctor's bland assurances gave her no comfort; she remembered too well Alison's own words—"Yes, mother I *can* given him up; but when I do, I shall be giving up my own life too."

Her brother was quite certain Alison would never recover. His nervous agitation was most distressing, and almost more than his sister could stand. He could settle down nowhere, but wandered about the house, seeking the chance of a word with Alison's mother.

What had happened? They dared not ask Alison; but they recalled how wretched she had looked that morning.

"I thought they must have had a misunderstanding yesterday," said Uncle John to his sister. "But he called on me, just after Alison had left for St. Saviour's, and seemed in the most buoyant spirits. I am sure he talked in the most delightful way about the certainty of the little invention being a tremendous success. I never felt so warmly for him before. I stood on the step, watching him, after he had gone to fetch Alison at St. Saviour's. As soon as he heard she was there, he said he would go after her. He was brimming over with love and hopefulness; I'm sure he was.

What can have happened? I can't believe it is all over! If it is—God help them both! May I go to the Tower and see him, Mary?" he asked timidly.

"Certainly not!" returned his sister, and went off at once to Alison's room.

An hour later, she met him wandering on the stairs, in a state of utter dejection.

"But I must do something, Mary," he said piteously.

"John, I insist upon your not interfering," said Mrs. Bayliss sternly.

John Harbuckle retired to his den, but came out of it every five or six minutes to listen, or to steal down to Alison's door.

"May I send for Mariora?" he ventured to ask, the next time he met his sister.

"No! Do you want to kill Alison outright?" returned Mrs. Bayliss under her voice.

"But we ought to know. How can we tell what to do, if we don't know?" persisted John Harbuckle.

"Are you going to drive me mad?"

demanded his sister. "Do you think I haven't enough to distress me?"

Quelled for the moment, poor Uncle John slowly sought his den once more, but not even his awe of Mrs. Bayliss could keep him there; far into the night his sister could hear his restless prowling. Many a time she stole softly in at Alison's half-opened door; when she returned, her brother would meet her with the same questions, in the same whisper—

"Is she sleeping, Mary?"

Mary could only shake her head.

"Is she crying?"

Mary could only shake her head, still more sorrowfully.

"What can have happened? Shan't I go for the doctor again?"

CHAPTER XVIII.

PARTED: BASIL.

Basil Penrose, when he had seen the woman he loved and worshipped kiss the dead hand of the woman he had wronged, fled away from the sight as if he never could flee far enough from it. To put distance between it and himself was his first impulse. He never paused until he had reached the room in the Bell Tower where he had worked. The "little invention," on which he had bestowed so much thought and care, was standing near the barred window. He saw it as he entered the ancient room. It arrested him with an awful sense of its utter valuelessness. It was worthless to him now, as his love for Alison was worthless now to her.

For one moment it seemed as if he must destroy that work of his hand. Why preserve it to torture him with a continual reminder of love and happiness gone for ever? Why not be rid of what now had no real worth? Of what use was life, success, all he had prized and striven for, without Alison? But he would be master of himself. There was no time for vain wrath. He must go, and there was work to be finished before he could go. Work was valueless, but it must be done. He arranged all his tools and instruments carefully and quickly. Then, with a list of measurements in his pocket, he went out and ordered cases; returned to his lodgings, and worked the rest of the day and the whole night through, on the memoranda of his recent experiments, getting them into perfect order — working on them, one would have thought, by his expression of absolute concentration on what he was doing, as if his whole being were still engrossed in his work.

In the morning, as soon as he could get into the Bell Tower, he went there again, and finished a few little things he had left from the previous day. Presently, the cases came; he packed them all carefully, and left the Bell Tower, left the Prisoner's Walk he had so often looked at from his window in the Strong Room, crossed the Green, ascended the winding stairs to the leads of the White Tower, and entered his turret. There the one isolated ray of cold north light fell full upon him; there in his narrow cell with the rough unhewn stone walls, still as those walls within which he had worked and planned and thought so long, he stood, in the midst of that one ray of light.

Look at him now. Mark the head, so full of intellectual power; the strong, noble brow, under the overshadowing rings of dark hair; the deep scowl between the eyes; the long aquiline dip of the firmly set nose; the short upper lip; the closed mouth, its outlines so delicate, so proud,

so sensitive—at that moment so infinitely pathetic. Look at him well, I repeat, for you will never see him there again, and tell me if there is any, even the faintest trace of contrition in that still imperious head. Mournfully droop the lids over the eyes we cannot see; mournful as death are the thin, woman-like lips; but on those closed lips lie the words, "I've loved, and lost!" not "I have sinned; forgive me!"

So he stands there in that one isolating ray, stone still, how long he neither knows nor cares. So stands Basil Penrose, alone among his familiar work, in the Tower of London for the last time; then, with a sudden outburst of fierce energy, he springs at the battons that darken the small Norman windows, and with his strong, slender hands wrenches them away. The beam, in which he has worked so long, mingles with the full daylight that streams in from each side; the one isolated ray has gone.

CHAPTER XIX.

HIS SISTER.

Mariora called at Trinity Square on the following Monday. She was looking very pale and worn out. She had been incessantly engaged since she had parted with Alison, and there had been a foreboding of evil hanging over her all the time—not strange, considering Alison's distress after that last fatal walk with Basil. So heavily had the sense of coming calamity pressed upon her, that, on the Sunday evening, it had been only by the severest self-control, and the most earnest and constant prayer, that she had been kept from breaking down utterly. On the Sunday evening, the great assembly bowed their heads while she sang Frances Haver-

gal's Consecration Hymn, amidst a profound silence that might be felt. Few who were present will ever forget it; it was the turning-point in many a life. When Mariora called at John Harbuckle's, on her way back to Mrs. Maxwell's, she was feeling very tired and dispirited.

Mrs. Bayliss met her in the drawing-room.

"Mariora, what has happened?" she asked abruptly.

"Happened! to whom?" cried Mariora, with sudden terror.

"Your brother has nearly killed my Alison," said Mrs. Bayliss, in her bitterest tones.

"Oh no, no! That can't be!" exclaimed Mariora. "Where is she? Let me see her!"

"Don't you know, then?" said Mrs. Bayliss sharply.

"Indeed, indeed, I don't! Hasn't she told you? Perhaps she will tell me; do let me see her," pleaded Mariora.

"I suppose I had better," said Mrs. Bayliss, suppressing her fear and rage with a great effort. "I have never but once grieved that my child met your brother, and that has been—always! It's all over now! You had better see her."

She led the way upstairs. Alison was lying on the sofa by the fire. Her mother went up quickly to her.

"Darling, here is Mariora! She has come to see you," she said, in a painfully strained voice.

Mariora went up to the sofa, and kneeled down by it. Alison feebly stretched out her arms to her, gazing at her earnestly with her sleepless, weary eyes.

Mrs. Bayliss turned away hastily to hide the burning tears she could keep back no longer, leaving Alison and Mariora alone.

"I've had a shock, dear," Alison whispered, in a voice that seemed only the faintest ghost of her own. "I've had a shock! I shouldn't mind, only the others are so frightened. It's all over! I had to send him away. He's gone!"

"Gone!" echoed Mariora, aghast; "gone!"

"Yes, he's gone! I had to tell him to go. It nearly killed me! I feel as if I had been dead; but I'm better now. When I can sleep again, I shall get better quickly; and I want to get better so much, because mother and Uncle John frighten themselves about me. If I could sleep—only I can't; I'm always awake, and I'm so tired—oh, so, so tired!" She paused, and leaned her head against Mariora's shoulder.

"Oh, my poor darling! my poor darling!" cried Mariora, with white and trembling lips.

"I couldn't tell them why I had to tell him to go," Alison went on, without raising her head. "Mother always hated him; I can't bear that she should know why it was. Need she know? I will tell you. Perhaps you know already; perhaps that was why you and he——"

Then the pent-up stream burst its bonds; Alison began to talk, and she talked on and on, telling Mariora everything that had happened, everything she had said to him.

"Nothing else was possible, was it?" she added, when all was told, with a simple, heart-broken pathos, more terrible than any wild burst of passion would have been. "Do tell me, dear—was anything else possible?"

Mariora's beautiful dark head drooped lower and lower, until her tears and agony of shame and grief aroused Alison's fears. Raising herself, she in her turn drew Mariora to her, trying to soothe her.

"Don't! don't cry so, dear! Oh, don't cry so! You'll make yourself ill. And you mustn't be ill; you are too valuable; you can't be spared. Don't cry! I never cry. I haven't cried once since this has happened. I have forgotten how to cry."

Then it was Mariora's turn to sob out. "Oh, she was my first convert! How good and earnest she was until he came home! She was going to be married. The young man—he, too, was one of mine; now he's a drunkard! And I have prayed for them all. I always hoped and hoped against

hope for them—and oh! for Basil, my brother, my brother!"

It was piteous to see those two; to see Alison's wan face bending over that beautiful head that was pressed against her bosom, in such dire sorrow.

After a long while Mariora grew quieter, arose, and put on her hat, which she had thrown aside, and drew her veil over her tear-stained face.

"Don't go away. Where are you going?" asked Alison.

"To the Tower. I must see him."

"But I have sent him away," said Alison, with that over-calm look in her tearless eyes, that was so terrible to see.

"For you nothing else was possible; but——"

"You are sure I could do nothing else?" asked Alison; "you are quite sure?"

"Quite sure. There was nothing else for you to do; but I am his sister. I must always be his sister; I can never send him away."

"Yes," said Alison faintly, "yes, go to him. You can. For you he is not *gone*; for me he is gone, gone. Oh, so much more gone than if he were dead! For me he does not even exist; the image of him went all at once, dear; only, where he once was, there is—I do not know what it is—a vague, hateful form, I cannot tell what; but the face, when I see it for an instant, is not his, it is not human, it makes me shudder. He has gone right out of existence; perhaps he never existed, perhaps I never loved him—not him; only what I thought was he. It must have been so, else I should have died of shame before now. But you will not tell mother, will you?" she went on, with just a little break in that terrible over-calmness of hers. "I could not bear mother to know—at least, not yet. She hated him so."

Mariora dared not trust herself to reply; she shook her head and hurried away.

Mrs. Bayliss, who was watching for her by the drawing-room door, stopped her.

"Well?" she began sharply.

"Do not ask! Oh, do not ask! You would say Alison is right, and I—" with great sob—"I must say so too. Oh, let me go!"

Her distress moved even Mrs. Bayliss; she did not attempt to detain her.

Without asking herself why she was going to the Tower, she hurried there, and among the heaps of new stone, and *débris* of old, she found her way to the Salt Tower. Basil was gone; gone no one knew whither, "to foreign parts," they told her. Mechanically she turned and retraced her way to John Harbuckle's house. She found Alison lying just as she had left her, with her sleepless eyes still wide open. She raised them very slightly, as if in vague inquiry.

"He has gone! gone abroad," said Mariora, trying to speak calmly.

"Yes," said Alison, in the faintest whisper; but there was hardly a change in her expression; she had sunk into that

strange state when one thing means very nearly the same as another.

"I must go home at once," said Mariora.

"Must you?" asked Alison; but there was no tone of real questioning in her voice.

"Yes, dear. I shall only do you harm; and my parents will want me. God bless you! good-bye!" said Mariora, her voice breaking with the last words.

"Good-bye. You will come again soon?" said Alison, with that still, sad placidity so heartrending to hear.

"Good-bye!" returned Mariora; and with a kiss that hardly touched the pale forehead, she left Alison, who saw her leave as if she were but a figure in a dream.

She went home to her parents at once. There was mourning, bitter and grievous, at Low Kelvingham that night.

CHAPTER XX.

HER RESOLVE.

They took Alison down to Hastings. The weather was still wonderfully fine; she sat by hours at the window, gazing out on to the pearl and gold of the winter sea. Then days came when she would take John Harbuckle's arm, and walk a little way; but on the pavement and on the broad promenade alike, it seemed to her as if she were treading on clouds. Nothing was substantial, nothing was real; but from that cloudland, often and often she seemed to herself to be stretching out arms to that other cloudland —that past, long past, of her life; those remote ages before Basil had come to her— the happy, empty days after Jessie's wedding, when Alec did not come, although,

perhaps—only perhaps—still, perhaps—she had been waiting for him; the days on one of which she had come face to face with herself in the long panel of glass. Through all the mists that image of herself, as she had seen it, was clear to her now; clearer, more definite, perhaps, than anything else. She tried to think of it. Welcome anything, that would hide from her that vague horror that haunted her! If only there were a grave, a deep, deep grave, in which all the intervening space, the centuries it made her pale cheeks burn with shame to remember, could be buried for ever;—buried and covered over, so that the grass might grow above it, and the daisies spring up, and a path be made across it, back again to the day of Jessie's wedding!

* * * * *

They were still at Hastings when Christmas Day came. They went to church in the morning. During that day, now and then, 'Alison felt, for the first time since

her illness, that there was some reality *still* in life. She became conscious of a present and of a future. It was a long while now to her, since she had had a future. Basil was to have been her future. He was gone.

It was very dreadful to them all on Christmas evening. The three of them sat round the fire, each one haunted by ghostly memories that refused to be laid. Ah, Christmas is an awful time to most of us, who have passed the days when we can take delight in toys! They never had had a merry Christmas since the death of Alison's father; but, on other Christmases, there had been Jessie with them. Even last year, when they were all in mourning for the sudden death of Jessie's poor father, she and her Mac had been there to keep them alive. But this Christmas, as the evening wore on, speech became impossible, and silence intolerable. Mrs. Bayliss, at last, broke down and retired to her room. When she had left them, John Harbuckle

gradually brought his chair nearer his niece's. Presently, he put his arm round her slight waist and began to talk, at first shyly and with difficulty, in short, slow sentences, afterwards with freedom. He told her much that she had not heard before, about the Jessie of Catherine Court, whom, in his long gone-by youth, he had loved as far back as he could remember; he told her all the romance of the Tower Gardens, and of the man who had stolen his Jessie away from him, and of how long it had been before he could forgive him, and how, at last, he had been enabled to do so, fully and freely, with all his heart, and had felt heaven's own blessing in the doing of it.

"So, child, beyond the dark valley of the shadow of death there is light," the old bachelor said, as he ended his narrative.

"The valley of the shadow of death!" echoed Alison, in the quiet voice of hers, that made John Harbuckle feel as if he must break down altogether, so heavily

lay the dimness of that awful shadow upon her. "And you have been through it, Uncle John; yet it has not spoiled either you or your life."

"Ah, I cannot say that! I cannot say that!" exclaimed John Harbuckle, as if stung with sudden pain.

"I mean," continued Alison, "going through the valley of weeping, you dug wells there, like the people in the eighty-fourth Psalm. And your life wasn't spoiled; it's been a blessing to many, Uncle John; to the widow and fatherless, to all whom you could help. And I want to be like you, Uncle John, God helping me. I won't let my life be spoiled, if only I could get strong again, and — " whispering very wearily, as she lay her head against his arm—"and, if only I could once, just once, cry."

* * * * *

They had dreaded the return to town for Alison, but she bore it well; mists and rain mercifully hid the Tower from

her. Their daily life was falling slowly back into its usual quiet routine, when on the last morning of the year, the *Times* contained this announcement:—"In his thirtieth year, Basil, the only and dearly loved son of the Rev. B. Penrose, Rector of Low Kelvingham, Suffolk." It had occurred in a remote mining district in Servia.

CHAPTER XXI.

MRS. BAYLISS'S TENANTS.

Let us leave the grief-charged atmosphere of John Harbuckle's house, and let us fly northward to Cauld-knowe, the Borderland home Mrs. Bayliss loved to speak of as "her little place in Birrendale." Cauld-knowe, like many of the red sandstone houses of the dale, was built all ground-floor, after the manner of an Indian bungalow. It seemed to sit rather than stand on a small plateau, high up above the Birren Water, the rushing of which swift stream could be heard from it, when the river was in spate, even above the howling of the fiercest winter tempest. Poor Alison used to say, when she first went away from her northern home to Tower Hill, that the noise of the

London traffic distinctly recalled to her the rushing sound of the Birren. Alas! on this sad New Year's Day, Alison had no ear for such associations, nor for any other sound than the death knell in her own heart. On that day, too, in toiling London there were heavy mists and fogs to deaden all sound; but away beyond the broad borders the sun shone brightly on the Scotch holidaymakers, and the distant Solway, as seen from the windows of Cauldknowe, shone like silver, while the frozen surface of the Birren gleamed with many an opaline tint.

"Just a grand day for the curling!" was the first remark Malcolm Carruthers made to his wife that morning. Mac and Jessie were Mrs. Bayliss's tenants, and very good tenants too, they were. The driving power they both possessed was truly wonderful! Mac drove out of doors about "the policy," as the ground near the house was called; and Jessie drove the house itself, with results that gave un-

bounded satisfaction at least to themselves, although Jessie's lamentations were as incessant as her handling of the domestic reins was vigorous. In fact, they were a very vigorous young couple, suiting each other to perfection, and knowing that they did so, in spite of the choice store of abusive language they not only kept by them, but used very freely to each other, with or without provocation. They were always equal to calling each other names.

That New Year's morning, Mac kept his wife waiting at the breakfast-table for five whole minutes. There were, however, so many letters to open, and huge short-cakes to unpack, that the minutes slipped away unnoticed, and Mac had actually returned from the stable before Jessie was conscious that he had kept her waiting at all. She was in such good humour that she felt inclined to let him off his scolding; "but no," she said to herself, "duty is duty; and discipline is the life and soul of the British army, and also of domestic

life!" She was just about to give her husband a thorough good talking to, when Mac, who had, as Jessie was about to observe, taken up the day old *Times*, in the coolest and most impudent manner, just as if he had not wilfully broken one of the fundamental laws of the household, exclaimed—

"Here, Jessie, read that!"

Jessie read the announcement of Basil's death in silence, and returned the paper without a word. On that morning, when everything so gleamed and sparkled with brightness, Death seemed an unspeakable word.

"It is the man?" Mac presently asked.

Jessie nodded. "My poor Alison! Oh, my poor Alison!" she cried, after another pause. "I ought to have known she couldn't possibly get on without me! This explains why there's not a single line from auntie, this morning. Alison must be very ill again. I dare say this will just kill her!"

"Well, you really ought to have kept her more in hand; you ought, indeed!" said Mac.

"I'm sure I thought I left everything quite cut and dried for them, when I married you. Alec had only to propose; that was just the only one thing I left him to do, and he must needs go and muff that! And now I shouldn't wonder but Alison goes and dies! You really should have kept Alec up to it; why didn t you? Why did you let him be such a muff?"

"As if I could help it! I tell you what it is, Jessie, Alison is a very difficult girl to marry," said Mac, with conviction. "I'm no coward, but I'm blessed if I could have attacked Alison."

"You? you? Why, there's—there isn't one grain of anything about you that could possibly please her!"

"No," said Mac simply. "That's just what I said; she is such a difficult girl to marry. However, do give me my coffee, or I'll be late for the curling."

"And that's about all you care for! I call you positively heartless! I don't think I'll go to Muirhead to-day. There'd be Alec there, and that would be more than I could stand under the circumstances; besides, I've taken to hate Mrs. Carruthers lately; she doesn't appreciate Alison. I hate people who don't appreciate Alison. I'll stay at home, and think what I must do. I shall have to do something. I shall have to be very ill, I suppose; that's the only way I know of for getting Alison here, and keeping her under my own wing."

"Oh, for heaven's sake, don't try that on!" exclaimed Mac. "I couldn't stand it!"

"I don't know that I won't; something must be done, and I suppose that, as usual, I'm the only person to do it."

"Well," said Mac bluntly, "I don't want to say anything brutal, but I don't see why you should make such a fuss, now the man's dead. Being dead—why, there's an end to——"

"No, of course you don't see. Could you ever see an inch before you? You are as blind as you're callous. But I see, and only too plainly. Don't you think Alison will get over this in a minute, because she won't! If it doesn't kill her——"

"Then, why on earth did she send him away!" broke out Mac, vehemently. "What sense is there in a girl's sending a fellow away, and then breaking her heart for him?"

"Sense or no sense, it's what girls do. Oh, Mac, you darling, darling old idiot! Don't you feel that you're alive and he's dead?" said Jessie, looking first at her husband with a wavering, pathetic smile, and then, with her hazel eyes dimmed, out of the window, over the sparkling frosted lawn to the belt of dark firs beyond it, seeing not the wood above the Birren, but a certain episode in her unmarried life, when she and Mac had had that terrible misunderstanding that had so nearly proved fatal.

Mac, well and vigorous now, knew the meaning of the wistful tenderness in his wife's sweet face, pushed away his plate, went to Jessie, put his arms round her shoulders, and kissed her many times.

"Never mind, you good old Mac," said Jessie, patting the big hands that pressed her to him so fondly. "Never mind if I am cross to you sometimes; you are alive, dear, you are alive! And once I thought—" and she broke off with a little shudder.

There was still a very ugly scar dangerously near Mac's left eye. Then they said a good many things that need not be put down.

"So you will drive over to Muirhead and look at the curling, love, and lunch with aunt, and be very nice to her?" presently asked Mac, interspersing each question with a kiss.

"You want to make me believe that you won't enjoy your curling unless I come and freeze myself to death with looking at you. That's a too transparent fraud,

my dearest! Never attempt a fraud, Mac; you are far too honest and clumsy by nature. Honesty's your line; stick to it!"

"Then, you will come, Jessie? It is true I should enjoy the game anyhow; but still, come."

"I'll just think about it, Mac dear."

"When I was young and foolish, and fished down at the brae foot, a girl named Jessie used to come down there sometimes; and when she came she used just to be like sunshine to me."

"Ah, you weren't married then! And she was Jessie Bayliss; now her name's Carruthers; that makes all the difference. Well, I'll think about it, Mac; I'll just think about it. The fact is, you are afraid of meeting Alec, unprotected by me!"

"I am such a happy beggar myself," exclaimed Mac, "that I can't bear having to face a poor wretch that's out in the cold! Good heavens, Jessie!"—looking at the clock—"it's a quarter past nine, and I told that fellow McQuade to bring the

horse round at the ten minutes past! Oh, I say, this won't do, Jessie! That rascal will have to go! I always knew we were wrong in keeping him!"

"Ay! Who was five minutes late himself just now?"

Mac rushed off; fortunately the horse was in sight so that for the time McQuade escaped without dismissal.

"I shall expect you, Jessie," said Mac, as he rode off to the curling at Muirhead.

"There'll be no harm in that," Jessie returned, as from the red-ochred doorstep she bade him good-bye.

When Mac had gone as far along the drive as he could be seen from the house, he called back to the little figure with the white fluffy shawl over its head—

"Come!"

Jessie's laugh rang out merrily in the crisp air. An instant after, when Mac was out of sight, Jessie's face grew grave.

"To think my Mac is alive and not dead!" and the thought filled her with a

thankful awe. "I must write at once to auntie, and know about poor Alison."

Presently she returned, shivering, to her bright little dining-room, drew a chair up to the fire, put her feet upon the low stone boundry of the pretty tiled hearth, and gazed into the fire, unable to think any thought except that her Mac was alive, and that Alison's Basil Penrose was dead.

"It is too awful!" she said. "Whatever may have parted them, his death must be too awful for Alison. Dear Alison!" she went on, after a while. "How poor and wretched we used to be in this very house, after uncle's death—in this very house! I often tell myself it was in this very house we went through those hard times together; but I never can realize it, it seems so bright and happy here now. But we used to laugh and forget our misery when we were 'coffeeing and sconing,' as we called it, in the kitchen! Ah, no one else can be like Alison to me! How good she was, poor darling! all through that

dreadful time, when we didn't know whether Mac was going to live or die! What would have become of me without her? I am afraid this must have been too great a shock for her so soon after the other; she must be very ill again—worse than before, perhaps—or aunt would never have allowed New Year's morning to come without even a card from either of them. She can't get over things as I can. I used to say her hands were made of egg-shell china. How I wish she never had met that man!" and Jessie turned to the writing-table, and wrote a few lines to Mrs. Bayliss, simply asking how Alison was.

Hardly was the note finished, when Alec Carruthers rode past the window. Jessie hid the note away in the blotting-case. "Poor fellow! I wonder how many times he has been here, and how often he has written to me, since he knew that Alison and that man had parted!"

A minute afterwards, Alec entered the room, looking exceedingly anxious.

"Have you heard from them this morning?" was his first question; and as he put it he watched Jessie's face as, one day last summer, he had watched the door of the Queen's House from the Tower Green. His earnest gaze, so like the breathless intentness with which a man scans the face of the physician when the life or death of his best beloved is trembling in the all but even balance, made Jessie's eyes grow misty.

She shook her head, feeling very much inclined to cry, as much for Alec as for Alison.

"Not a card?" asked Alec, his eyes never straying an instant from Jessie's face.

"No."

"Not a word?"

"Not a word."

"She must be ill! I can see you think so."

"I must think so; I can't help it."

"May I go to her? Yes,"—as Jessie pointed to the *Times* on the ground—"yes, I know. I saw it last night. I have had no sleep. I was just forced to come over

to you this morning. I feel—I feel—" huskily—"as if she were going to die, and as if I just couldn't give her up when I had begun to hope again! Can't I go and see Mrs. Bayliss? I wouldn't ask to see *her*. It will be no use your telling me you are not anxious; I know you are."

"I am, Alec. I can't wait while you go to London. Ride over to Allarbie with a telegram, and stay for the answer. Here" —taking the note from the blotter—"this question will do, send it as from me."

Thankful for the task, Alec put the note into his pocket, left at once, and rode over to Allarbie—the nearest town whence a telegram could be sent on that New Year's Day—as fast as his horse would take him. It was something to be on the way to sending a message. He was so restless, that even the taking that message was a relief. He could not be quiet until he had some news of Alison.

He sent off the telegram; and then came the long waiting, that seemed as if it would

never end. He sat in the shabby little station, listening for the ticking of the telegraph instrument, although he knew it could not come for a considerable while. All through the night, ever since he had seen that announcement, a desperate war had been raging in his heart; jealousy, fierce and strong; love, stronger and more passionate still; awe at the death of a Christless man; a triumph that he was ashamed of that his rival was gone; dread for Alison, and hatred of the cause of that dread; a resolution to win her now; a sickening fear that she might slip away from him into the grave; and, through all, a fight of faith, a stern battling with himself, a desperate struggle to place all in God's keeping. But, as he waited for the ticking of the telegraph, anxiety for Alison had conquered and submerged all else, except the constant prayer for patience.

At last the welcome signal broke the silence of the station, the message from Tower Hill had come.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE TURN OF THE YEAR.

"DEAD! Basil Penrose dead!" Unspoken were the words, but how their sound had echoed and re-echoed through Alison's heart all through that last day of the Old Year! Like the thunder-clap, they stunned her; but, as they rolled away, clearer and clearer grew the words and their meaning.

That last day of the Old Year was dreadful indeed, to the inmates of the old house on Tower Hill. John Harbuckle and his sister hardly dared speak to each other, or even look at each other; their hearts were too full of dread for Alison.

"John, if she would only cry!" said Mrs. Bayliss, over and over again. But all day long she lay perfectly still and

dazed, stunned with that thunder-clap, to the terror of the two who loved her so dearly. Night came, and the echoes as they came back to her grew clear; she knew that Basil was dead. But each time her mother stole into Alison's room, she found her as still as she had been all day.

At length it was midnight, and the Old Year died. The bells of the City pealed loudly in innumerable chimes. Alison heard them. They roused her to the consciousness that the New Year had come, the New Year that had no Basil in it. She turned wearily on her pillow, and a tear slowly welled up in each eye, and another and another, and then a flood. And she wept for him,—and wept for him,—and wept for him, as if she would weep herself away.

Her mother and uncle, with pale, anxious faces, had crept upstairs, and were listening at her door. When at last she heard the sound of weeping, Mrs. Bayliss fell on her brother's neck, sobbing, "Oh, John, John, thank God, she's crying!"

* * * * *

A few days later came a letter from Mariora. There had been an explosion of nitro-glycerine among some Servian mines Basil had been exploring. How they had loved him, how broken-hearted they were, none could know, except that one to whom Mariora wrote.

"My hope for him"—this was Mariora's last sentence—"my hope for him is, that all judgment is given to Christ, '*because He is the Son of Man.*' Rest on those blessed words, dearest, as strives to rest,

"Your loving

"MARIORA."

"Because He is the Son of Man!" The words shone out in the dark night of her grief like a beacon. Through a sea of anguish and bereavement, and of a wild self-reproach, that rose up to mock her, she fought her way towards them, and at last, after much fierce battling her spirit, reached not the mere words, but the Son

of Man Himself. And Basil's face grew to her human once more, and it was to her as if she took all the solemn past and laid it down at the pierced feet of Him whose judgment is just, because He is the Son of Man who alone knows what is in man.

CHAPTER XXIII.

IMPOSSIBLE?

Mrs. Bayliss's message to Jessie ran—

"Yesterday was dreadful. She is sleeping quietly now."

Alec read it, and rode off with it to Cauld-knowe at a desperate rate.

"Thank God, she's better!" was his first thought, but his next was the fiercest pang of jealousy and despair he had yet felt. "Oh she'll never love me like that, never! Why try for what is hardly worth the winning? If I won her, if she were my wife for seventy years, the dead man would always stand between us." He could not have put it down in black or white, nor even have spoken the words; but the

jealousy raged wildly in his heart. What had he done that she should push him aside as utterly worthless, when she had so lavished love upon a man she herself had sent away? He had hoped again of late; now he felt there was no chance for him; she had loved that other man too much, she had given him all the love she had, there was none left for Alec now, it would all be buried in the grave of that dead man, for whom her heart, and perhaps even her life, was breaking.

"I never saw Alec so stirred up and altogether out of himself as he was when he came back from Allarbie this morning," said Jessie to Mac, later in the day.

When she ran out to the doorstep to meet him, he handed her the telegram without a word. She read it, and exclaimed with a sigh—

"What a relief!"

"Good-day for the present, Jessie," said Alec quite sharply.

Jessie glanced quickly up from the

message; Alec's tone was so different from his usual slow speech.

"No, no, don't go yet. You must drive me over to Muirhead. Mac will be mad if you go back without me; besides, I want to ask you something."

With a bad grace Alec dismounted, and followed Jessie into the house.

"When did she first meet that man?" he demanded abruptly, as soon as they were alone.

"She never told me. We had a quarrel about him. You know I always took your part."

"I know you have always been my friend. They did not meet before your wedding day?"

"Oh no!"

"But she—she changed; her manner was different to me on the wedding day!"

"On the wedding day! Why? You must have said something to her. *Your* manner must have changed also."

"No doubt, I showed my meaning too

plainly. I began to say what I had long felt, and then her manner changed, and I turned dumb again."

"Well," said Jessie, "and what happened then ?"

"I went to Euston and took a ticket, but when I saw the train I just couldn't go ; I couldn't put three hundred miles between us ; I let it start without me. I met an old friend of my father's, who pressed me to go down with him to his place in Sussex ; so I went and spent three or four miserable days there."

"While Alison was wandering about, looking for her lost Jessie!" said Mrs. Mac. "She has told me all about those empty days, when it seemed to her that every one was gone. Oh, Alec, you silly boy! What a chance you threw away then!"

"I don't know ; probably it would have come to just the same. When I saw her again, it was at the Tower. I spoke out ; she simply tried to talk me down."

"Yet she had a liking for you! Why didn't you just make the liking loving, Alec?"

"Did she ever tell you she cared for me?" asked Alec.

"Not in so many words," said Jessie.

"Ay! I am just Mac's cousin, that's all. When I tried to be some one else, she put me in what she wishes me to consider my proper place," said Alec.

"You were a bit wearisome, but—" Jessie began.

"Ay! The dumb devil possessed me!" cried Alec. "I would never have dared to speak to any other girl; but I thought she was not like others; I could sometimes talk to Alison and feel almost free. She was kind, and let me talk to her, until I thought she cared for me. Now I know she never did, even before that man was in the way. She never did; I wearied her, as I should have wearied any other girl."

"You should have let me finish; but, I was going to say, *you are not wearisome*

now. *Before*, you and she had little in common; *now*, you can share what is to her the greatest of all interests; you and she may one day be very happy together now; not yet, of course; some day. I'm afraid, Alec, you would never have been very happy together, had she said 'yes' on my wedding day. But we mustn't stop talking here; you must drive me over to Muirhead. Mac will be wearying for me! And, Alec, don't lose heart. It will all come right, no doubt; only, remember that Alison is the very girl to go and join a sisterhood, or turn deaconess, or hospital nurse. A word to the wise is enough, and, surely, with her mother and me to back you up——"

"I might win her hand, perhaps. But her love's all gone with that dead man," said Alec sadly.

"I doubt it!" said Jessie with decision. "No, Alec, not all! She feels so just now; but she being what she is, and he what I should think he was, she could never

have given him all. It is impossible; I'm sure it is."

"Impossible! Thank you, Jessie; that is a good word for me."

They drove together through the Dale. Here and there they passed a space of frozen stream and frosted river-banks.

"How dreadfully we all cried when we had to leave Cauld-knowe and go to Uncle John's!" said Jessie. "Poor Alison, she clung so to the place; she has such a love of places. She told me, afterwards, that all the time Mac was driving us along this very road, she kept crying in her heart: 'I cannot leave you, Birrendale!'"

"Ay!" said Alec, quoting Alison's own too-well-remembered words. "She hadn't learned to love London then."

"Still, Birrendale was her first love."

CHAPTER XXIV.

ALISON'S NEW YEAR.

ALISON faced her desolate New Year resolutely. Her physical strength returned fitfully, but for many a month her nerves vibrated painfully at the slightest touch. In time, she grew to look back upon what had past with a sad and pitying calm, too solemn for indignation or shame. Slowly she again took up, one after another, the more active of her usual occupations that had fallen from her grasp; but for a long while she never touched a pen, except to write a note or copy an extract for Uncle John. To go down to her Mission again required a great effort. The first time she went there, after she had gone a short distance on her little journey through the

drizzling rain and along the muddy streets, she suddenly came to a standstill, sure that she could not go on. But she went on again, and the first of her old friends she met gave her so heartfelt a welcome, that she went bravely from room to room, in the great block of buildings, with a cheerfulness that surprised herself. How pleased they all were to see her again! She was so overwhelmed with kind words, that once she had to go out on to the iron balcony to recover her composure. And the happiness that used always in other days to come into her heart when she visited her poor friends *would* try to force itself back; she could not long be depressed among them, depressing as all around looked on that rainy winter's day. Some she found in terrible straits, and her brain was obliged to set to work once more to devise means of helping them immediately. It was good for her. She felt that all she longed for was more power to help others.

Uncle John was kind and generous, but

Alison wanted to be helping with her own money as well as her own time and her own love. She sought out the vile court in which she had seen the dead baby sister of her little Sunday-school girl. It was constantly in her thoughts, and at last, one Sunday evening, when, after the little service in the ragged school, she was helping to serve out cups of steaming hot cocoa to the children, a simple little story of ragged London life, which had long dwelt in her memory, and at intervals tried vaguely, and in a disconnected way to assert itself, suddenly appeared to her mind as a perfect little whole, as a story that could be written. She had never yet dared to look at her unfinished book, her novel; but this simple little story took such possession of her, that the very next morning she began it, and worked away at it until, to her great surprise, it one day got itself finished. When the last word had come, and been written down, Alison did not dare to read the tale over; indeed,

it did not seem to her as if she had written it at all; rather, as if it were a thing of independent life. With the ink on the last slip scarcely dry, she ran down to John Harbuckle, laid the manuscript on the table before him, and vanished.

An hour afterwards, he found her. "Child, child! What have you written? Why, I've been crying my eyes out over it!" he said with much emotion.

"Then take it away, Uncle John; don't speak to me about it," said Alison, looking quite distressed.

He did not. He took it to a publisher, and spoke to him instead. It proved a great success; there was a demand for more.

It was just about the time that Alison made her first little literary success that, one bitterly cold day, she went to help at a penny dinner in South London. It was to be held in a neighbourhood she did not know well; she had some difficulty in finding her way. She was rather late, in consequence. When she arrived at the

place, the first batch of children were already in, and the door besieged by a noisy crowd of clamorous urchins. She gently made her way through the crowd to find the door guarded by Alec Carruthers. They recognized each other. The crowd pushed violently against the door as Alec opened it. Alison hurried into the dining-room, and in a minute or two afterwards, with a great linen apron round her, she was serving out Irish stew with a ladle that was almost as much as she could lift. There was not an instant or a thought to spare; everything had to be done with lightning speed, until the school-bell rang, and the last batch of children bundled out.

Alec had looked in now and then. As he had seen Alison hard at work and flushed with the heated atmosphere, it had struck him that she seemed very bright and busy, and like her own self again, and he had made up his mind to see her home. So, when the last set of urchins had rushed off, bread in hand, and he was free again,

he went into the room, expecting to see Alison there. But Alison was not there. As the room was clearing, terror had seized her. She felt that Alec would speak to her, and that she could not bear it. There was a back door; she fled away by it, and drove home as fast as she could. It was absurd, she told herself, but still she could not help it. She felt little compunction, however, on the score of Alec. Buttoned up in a thick jacket, his face ruddy with the nipping frost, and the bright sun giving a touch of northern fire to his hair, and with a certain briskness about him, such as she had never seen in him before, Alec certainly looked very unlike a rejected lover. There was something about him exceedingly at odds with her own state of feeling just then.

Strange to say, when Alec had seen Alison arrive, her face rosy with the frost, and her ways much more full of briskness than his own, he had also fancied she looked as unlike a broken-hearted maiden

as possible. He was hurt that she had left without speaking to him, but he felt he might now take a bolder line of action; so he presently went over the bridge, and called at John Harbuckle's house. Mrs. Bayliss was at home, and received him with most motherly sympathy. He made no secret of the cause of his visit. They talked freely on the subject; but when it came to Alec's begging very earnestly to be allowed to see Alison, who was lying down in her own room, Mrs. Bayliss was firm.

"No, Alec, not yet," she said.

"Oh, you can't think how tired I am of patience!" cried Alec.

But Mrs. Bayliss was firm.

"Thank you, mother, thank you, dear!" said Alison, when her mother told her who had been.

"Don't worry yourself; he will not come again for a long while."

"I hope not," said Alison wearily.

So the winter and spring went by, and

the summer came, and in its turn waned. Alison would not go away from London in the autumn, because, she said, that was just when her poor friends most needed her, every one else, nearly, having gone. In early September, Jessie Carruthers was very anxious that her aunt should come and stay with her for a few weeks; and Mrs. Bayliss, full of the pride and affectionate importance which an experienced matron, who is also an admirable nurse, is sure to feel when an exceedingly interesting domestic event is impending, was delighted to go once more to "her own little place in Birrendale." But before she left home, Mrs. Bayliss solemnly committed Uncle John into Alison's safe keeping.

"Now, take care!" she said. "Take care, Alison, and be sure you keep him up to the mark."

"Mother," returned Alison, with a smile, for by this time her lips had learned again to smile now and then, "I'll do my very best; indeed, I will."

With this assurance, Mrs. Bayliss departed, after she had several times promised her brother to send a telegram the moment she reached Carlisle.

John Harbuckle was in a most anxious state of mind until he received that telegram, for he never quite liked the idea of any woman taking a long railway journey alone, and there may have been other reasons; but when he had read it carefully three or four times, and felt certain that his sister was three hundred miles away, he came over to Alison, and, putting his hands on her shoulders, but hardly daring to look her in the face, so conscious was he of the enormity he meditated, he said gravely—

"My dear, I think we understand one another?"

"I think we do," returned Alison, gravely also, only there was just the suspicion of a crack in her gravity.

"Of course, I don't want you to think I'm going to take an undue advantage of

your dear mother's absence; but, if you don't mind, Alison, *I'd like to break out!*"

"Dearest Uncle John," exclaimed Alison, really almost like her old self. "Mind it? Break out as much as you like, dear! You can't break out too much for me! The more, the better!"

This is how that perfidious Alison kept her promise to her mother! Such is human nature, even at its best!

John Harbuckle did break out, and with a vengeance. He sent for his old servant, Robbins, and proceeded to overhaul the whole of the house to such an extent, that Alison declared the stairs were the only places where meals were possible. For a whole fortnight it seemed as if John Harbuckle were as happy as it was possible for him to be—and he had, in his way, a great capacity for enjoyment—when the great find of Roman antiquities in Bevis Marks sent him into a perfect ecstasy of delight.

Alison, who had not dared to write

freely to her mother about the overhauling, was diffuse on the find. "Uncle John," she wrote, "managed to secure a little bit of fresco. To see him, as he sits with it on his knee—to see the look of love and veneration with which he gazes at it, is really—in fact, my dictionary won't run to any adequate word for it. I can only suppose that so you and Jessie are now gazing at *the baby;* to whom, present my fondest and most respectful compliments." It will be seen by this that Alison was really growing a little like herself.

One evening, when she had finished washing John Harbuckle's china, and was nearly poisoned with the smell of varnish, and had been quite blocked out of every sitting-room, she thought she would take a chapter or two of her novel into the gardens of the Square, and try if she could read it. She had been much tempted to burn it unread, but she needed more money for her Mission. She dreaded to begin. The bare sight of the MS. was overwhelming.

But the very first page took her, not to the Queen's House, but to Birrendale. It was a lovely evening; she read out of doors until the twilight gathered. Then she rose, pale and trembling with emotion, to return. The evening was so very like one she had never quite ceased to remember—an evening about two years ago, in reality, but seeming as remote as the time of the Roman occupation of Britain. It was an evening, the one she recalled, when, as she had told John Harbuckle, whom they had met in the Square, she had "taken Alec out to see the bit of Old London Wall." Why should that have risen out of her Birrendale story? But that evening and that scene came back to her then, only very vaguely, very mistily. When she left the garden of Trinity Square, as if by instinct, she turned down the little blind street by the now unused Tower of London Station, to look once more at that bit of grey old wall. Very grey it looked in the clear, beautiful twilight; very grey and

very dead. Only out of that dead, grey old wall there sprang just one great tuft of grass, and out of the grass an army of minute flowers, sleeping peacefully, each one on its own tall, slender stalk. She stood gazing sadly at it, as if in a dream.

She might have heard a step had she listened or heeded; but in London footsteps are too many to be heeded. Presently she knew that Alec was standing by her, just where he had stood on that other evening, in those far-off, primitive ages, that were before Jessie's wedding day.

CHAPTER XXV.

WHAT THE WALL HEARD.

THE twilight had deepened until all colour had gone. The two grey figures stood quietly, side by side, under the old grey wall. It seemed to Alison quite natural that Alec should be there. For the moment, the great chasm that had rent her life was all filled up. Then Alec spoke under his voice.

"You have not forgotten that happy evening?"

She looked up steadily into his face without a blush, without a tremour.

"You told me you could wait," she said, slowly and clearly.

The greyness of her face, the sad, straight lips, the wan temples, unmanned

him with their silent reproach. He said no more. They turned in silence and walked towards her home. When they reached the door, Alison put out her hand.

"Forgive me," she said, gravely and simply.

"It is I who need forgiveness," he faltered, holding her hand between both of his.

She gently withdrew it. "Good-bye!" she said, her lips beginning to tremble, "good-bye!" and she vanished into the house.

CHAPTER XXVI.

IN THE NORTH.

After she had said good-bye to Alec, Alison felt she might safely venture to go to Birrendale. She had a perfect trust in Alec. Mrs. Bayliss came home, and Alison was commanded by Jessie to take her place. Mrs. Bayliss had been quite a long while away, and had enjoyed herself very much indeed. The sight of the house that was her very own, and the knowledge that Mac and Jessie were only tenants, comforted her exceedingly. Had John Harbuckle permitted, Mrs. Bayliss would have been delighted to have ruined herself in Birrendale once more; but on this point he was firm.

Alison had all the summer shrunk from

Birrendale, much as she longed to be there; but when Jessie absolutely commanded, of course, she had to be obeyed. So one fine morning, Alison set out on her long day's journey. The first sensation of vivid pleasure she had known for many months touched her when she knew, towards evening, that she was in the "bonnie North." She was in good spirits when she left the crowded train at Carlisle for the comparatively empty local one. She started again. She looked out on the long, level fields beside the Solway, where not a human being was to be seen, and sadness and loneliness crept over her. All the water of the Solway had run out, leaving one broad road of wet sand. It was dreary, and she was dreary too. But the rail struck inland; the dear, familiar, well-remembered hills were again in sight. She greeted them with all her heart, and hardly had she greeted them than the train stopped. There were Mac's great, big hands grasping hers, and Mac's great, big voice telling her all

sorts of things about Jessie and the youngster. They sprang into the dog-cart, and away they went along the fine hard country road, past the spruces and firs and the broad, beachen hedges.

"Ay; but, Mac, what's happened to the woods?" asked Alison eagerly.

"Happened?" exclaimed Mac. "Why, just a storm swept the whole country-side last winter, and there were thousands of trees down, tens of thousands!"

Alison felt a great sympathy for that country-side, where the sawn stumps were pointing at her from every hedge like so many cannon. But there was not much time for thought. There they were, already on the drive of grey Solway shingle, between the great banks of rhododendrons. And there, a few minutes later, was the red sandstone house, all ground-floor, like a bungalow, and far below it the rushing Birren. Alison was once more at Cauldknowe, the home of her girlish days; the home by the Birren, the beauty of which

had, years ago, lured her father to his ruin and his grave across the stream. Cauldknowe was flourishing again under the rule of Mrs. Bayliss's tenants.

"Here she is! Here's Alison!" shouted Mac, as he went into the hall.

A voice in the distance called blithely in return. Alison ran to it, and there, in the very room the girls had shared so long, sat Jessie, and on Jessie's lap, the baby!

Alison, after one kiss from Jessie, fell on her knees, and clasping her hands in adoration—

"Jessie!" she exclaimed, and stopped for want of voice for the moment. The fair young mother beamed and looked lovelier than ever. "Jessie!" repeated Alison, "oh, Jessie! This same shall comfort us!"

* * * * *

"This same" did, indeed, comfort Alison very much. Comfort came to her also from every well-remembered flower, from every rippling burn, from the solemn silver

firs by the dark, still salmon-pool, from the rush and splash of the mill-dam sluices, from the beautiful deep-red light in the brown waves of the Birren, as that swift stream tore down from its native hills to meet the distant Solway. Mac and Jessie, and Alison, too, were always full of business. Mac had the management of a large estate adjoining Cauld-knowe.

"And, of course," said Jessie, "we're awfully poor. Not poor, though, as you and I used to be here, once upon a time, when we had to do our sconing and coffeeing on nothing. Still we're beggars compared to the oligarchs around us, you know. Perhaps that is why we are so very jolly!"

It was astonishing how Alison picked up at Cauld-knowe.

* * * * *

So Alison returned to town, feeling greatly better, and time went on much as usual. The wide new Tower Street was finished. The light, open belfry of the old church of All Hallows, Barking, no longer

hidden behind the narrow alley, added another picturesque feature to John Harbuckle's "finest square in Europe." The completion of the Inner Circle Railway was a source of considerable pleasure to Mrs. Bayliss, as it enabled her to be almost as much at the West End, that now was so near, as on Tower hill.

* * * * *

But at Muirhead, in Birrendale, the while, a little cloud arose when the early snowdrops were being sent to Alison's Mission. They thought, as the warm weather came, it would disperse; but it did not, it grew heavier and darker as the months went by.

* * * * *

At Low Kelvingham also time went on, and brought with it many a change. Mariora stopped at home with her grief-stricken parents. Her father, who at one time had prevented her from holding meetings in his parish, now allowed her to do just what she liked, and what she liked worked for the good of all.

The daisies bloomed again in the turf that had been moved on two graves in the churchyard, the sun shone on two fresh names. The widowed mother of "the other one" placed her daughter's name below her husband's, kissed Mariora, and went to church again; the rest of the little rustic world went on much as before.

After a while, poor Basil's "little invention" was brought out. In a few months more it proved a great success, and the firstfruits of a golden harvest were sorrowfully gathered in by the rector. Happiness had fled from his home, but comfort came; it was all saddened, but it was material comfort none the less. It was a great pleasure to Mariora and her father to be able to help their poor people more than had been possible hitherto.

Then a year went by, and Mariora began to wear a coloured gown again. After another while there was a very quiet wedding in the crowded church at Low Kelvingham, and Mariora was the

bride. Her parents, thanks to the little machine, felt that they were justified in going abroad once more. To see the Albanian mountains, to go again to the scene of her childhood, had been the continual wish of Mrs. Penrose ever since she had been torn away from her early home. Mr. Penrose promised to gratify her, if possible; so they went to Greece as soon as Mariora had left them. But when they reached Athens, they heard such terrible accounts of the state of the mountains that they agreed to keep within the limits of civilization. A traveller had just been captured by the brigands. They wanted four hundred pounds for him. Mr. Penrose thought he saw ways of laying out four hundred pounds to better advantage than by applying them to his own ransom. Strange to say, his wife agreed with him.

"You are worth the money, yes!" she said. "But why throw money away? Besides, I too frightened for lose you, now I have no son no more."

There had been one or two slight notices of Basil and his work in the English papers; but the rector returned home with a book of cuttings from foreign journals, over which he pored for many and many an hour. By the judgment of those who ought to know, Basil would never have taken a high stand among scientific men in England; although the same authorities admitted that the memoranda of experiments in the White Tower were certainly very remarkable, and the ground perfectly solid as far as it went.

"Poor old chap!" remarked Hugh Merriman, as he noticed the well-remembered name in a review by a big wig, he was reading in India. "Poor old chap! His death was a blow to a good many; in fact, I shall always say that letter of apology he wrote me was worth getting insulted for. Poor old chap! Well, I still maintain he'd have been the Coming Man, if he'd only lived long enough!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

BEYOND THE BIRREN.

THE cloud over the Muirhead household had grown very heavy and very dark by the time Jessie's baby was a year old, and Alison was again at Cauld-knowe. Early that spring, Mrs. Carruthers' health had begun to fail; she was then not exactly ill, but rarely well, although she cut up her grey shirtings and sorted wool for her knitting club as industriously as ever. But there came a day when the scissors were laid aside for the last time, and another when even the wool could not be sorted. Then came suffering, long and terrible. Alec and Alison met daily, as part of the same family, and every

day Alison asked him the same hopeless question, to receive the same hopeless answer.

At last, one day, Mac was away at Muirhead for many hours, while Alison and Jessie, at Cauld-knowe, drew closer together, and felt over again the coldness of the shadow that had chilled them with a chill never to be forgotten, the day Alison's father had died. Mac came back at length, with red eyes and unsteady voice; for Mac had never remembered his own mother, and his aunt had been the guardian of his earliest years. It was all over; she was gone.

A few days later, there was a great funeral at Muirhead. Alison and Jessie, with all the women relatives and women servants, assembled upstairs. Mr. Baird, of Kirkhope, came and prayed with them, while the parish minister held a solemn service with the men below. Then came the sound of the slow grinding of many wheels over the hard gravel drive, and

Alison and Jessie stole away together, and clung to each other and wept.

The following morning, Alison went out by herself. She crossed the Birren to the grave-yard on the opposite bank. She saw they had buried Alec's mother very near her own father.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AT LAST.

One morning, Alison was standing on the little grey stone bridge that crossed the burn at the brae foot, and the burn was singing its last song before it fell into the river, and Alison was listening to that song, thinking how "all the rivers run into the sea yet the sea is not full," and watching the Birren, as it was running swiftly over its brown stone bed down to the Solway, while the shadows of the passing clouds darkened for an instant the clear water. Beyond was the graveyard, with the two graves so near together.

She turned, presently, and looked along the tangled banks of the stream, and there, just coming into the sunlight from beneath

the great, solemn silver firs, she saw Alec Carruthers coming towards her. She stopped an instant where she was, with her hand pressed tightly to her heart; then she went quickly to meet him. He hastened towards her. They came near; the shadow of the great mystery was on them both. They stretched out their hands to each other.

"Alec, I have come!"

He threw his arms round her, and drew her closely to him.

CHAPTER XXIX.

JULY.

VERY gladly would I leave Alec and Alison down by the Birren Water; but for the sake of those who always want to know the end of everything I must go on a little further.

Alison made a long stay with Jessie before she went back to Trinity Square. Her novel was finished at Cauld-knowe. It was published in the spring, and every one who knew the place thought the local colour charming; but its three volumes brought her Mission just half as much as her last little book, which had taken her three weeks to write. Her devoted Uncle John and his old friends thought the novel the most wonderful book ever written; and so did Alec. Mrs. Bayliss was proud of it, but pronounced it unsuited to the

average circulating library reader. A great burden rolled off Alison's mind when she actually saw those volumes as a published book. If you want to get rid of a haunting thought, put it in a book and have done with it. But some sorrows are hard to bury; they rise again perpetually.

When that book had appeared, Alison thought she was brave enough to go to the Tower once more, and felt she owed it to Alec that the spell of it should for ever be broken. So, once more, she again passed the familiar Moat, the dark archways, and ascended the steps to the Green. It was early, a misty morning; but the light mists were shot through with sunbeams. Rarely does the Tower look more beautiful than under such an effect. There were but few visitors as yet. Long lines of men, still as graven images, were drawn up on the Parade, while the officers made their tour of inspection up and down the ranks, and the drums and fifes played, over and over again, one lively air. Alison

rested on the garden seat before the Beauchamp Tower. *One* raven was dozing on the back of the chair, only *one*. Alison remembered the pair she had seen, side by side, on that other day.

"Poor bird!" she said. "And your mate, too, is dead! Are you sad, all alone?"

She raised her hand to stroke the glossy feathers. The widowed bird turned upon her menacingly, so she withdrew her sympathizing touch and turned her gaze upwards to the turret that used to be Basil's. That turret was now slightly shrouded by the mist; it did not stand out harshly; it was grey, like the atmosphere around it. She looked up to the roof and to the four turrets. What a procession of strange, but to her familiar, forms moved about them! The wicked Queen Isabella's wicked Mortimer escaping for his life across the leads; the heavy, falling body of that captive Welsh prince, whose son's head, crowned with willow, had mouldered on one of those turrets, where now a narrow shaft of sunlight touched the crowns and

pennants to living gold; the fair, brave Maud, of Baynard Castle, poisoned in the great round Clock Tower, where Flamstead used to work; the old ape who had crept away to die alone in the doorless eastern turret; a strange, motley procession, all old friends of Alison's brain; and among them, ah! among them there was always that other, that wizard of the north-east turret, Basil Penrose.

"Gone! gone! Only a memory, like all the rest of them! Only a memory; but—" and, for the moment, it seemed to her that it was still a memory that crushed her heart.

* * * * *

On a glorious day in the next July, they were married in the beautiful church of St. Olave's. Alec and Alison stood side by side, and went through their parts quietly but firmly; and it was remarked that the responses of both were very clearly spoken. They said also that the bride's manner at breakfast was charmingly natural and unconstrained.

At last, the final good-bye was spoken, and the happy pair drove off; but just before the carriage turned westward into the broad new street, Alison caught sight of the Look-out beyond the Queen's House, and grew pale to her very lips.

Alec knew all. The worst pang of jealousy he had ever felt seized him then. But it was the last; in another moment Alison turned to him, suddenly all rosy red, and looking into her husband's face, she said very earnestly and simply—

"Dear, I love you dearly! And I think—I think I must have done so always! We are going to be very happy together, aren't we, Alec? There is so much we shall be able to do together, and so much we both of us love."

"My wife!" was all Alec could manage to say.

THE END.

PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, LIMITED,
LONDON AND BECCLES. *G., C. & Co.*